THE
Complete
Asian
COOKBOOK
thailand
vietnam · cambodia
laos & burma
CHARMAINE SOLOMON

THE

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COOKBOOK

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Foreword

Just as France has its robust country fare as well as its subtle haute cuisine, so too does Asia have a range of culinary delights that can be simple, complex, fiery, mild, tantalising – and compulsive! Not all Asian food is exotic or wildly unusual. Noodle and rice dishes are as commonplace as the pastas and potatoes of the West. Many of the ingredients will be familiar to anyone who knows their way around a kitchen. The main differences have arisen just as they have arisen in other parts of the world – through the use of available ingredients. Thus there is a reliance on some herbs and spices less well known in the West. Meat is often replaced by the nutritious by-products of the soy bean and by protein-rich fish sauces and shrimp pastes.

True, some of the more unusual ingredients take a little getting used to. But once you have overcome what resistance you may have towards the idea of raw fish or dried shrimp paste or seaweed, you'll find that these (and other) ingredients are no less delicious than – and certainly as exciting as – those you use in your favourite dishes.

The introduction to each chapter will give you a good idea of what to expect in the way of out-of-the-ordinary ingredients. Almost without exception, those called for are readily available in most large supermarkets or Asian grocery stores; in the rare case they are not, suitable substitutes have been given.

Those of you already familiar with some of the Southeast Asian cuisines will, I hope, find recipes to interest and excite you in these pages; and I think you will be tempted to explore cuisines with which you are less well acquainted. For those of you who are coming to Southeast Asian cooking

for the first time, I have taken care to make sure the essential steps are clear and precise, with detailed instructions on the following pages for cooking the much-used ingredients (such as rice, noodles, coconut milk and chilli), and pointers on how to joint a chicken, portion fish and select and season a wok.

For most countries, the names of the recipes have been given in the dominant or most common language or dialect of the country concerned, followed by the English name in italics.

Generally, the letter ‘a’ in Asian words is pronounced as the ‘a’ in father, never as in cat; the letter ‘u’ is rather like the ‘oo’ in look, never as in duty; and the letters ‘th’ are generally pronounced like an ordinary ‘t’ (slightly aspirated), never as in breath or breathe. The pronunciation of Burmese names can be confusing. Just remember that the letters ‘ky’ sound somewhere between a ‘ch’ and a ‘j’, so that *kyazan* is pronounced ‘chahzan’ and *kyetha* as ‘chetha’. The letter ‘k’ in the middle of a word is silent; and the letters ‘t’ and ‘ke’ at the end of a word cut short the preceding vowel, so *lethoke* sounds like ‘letho’ and *gin thoke* sounds like ‘jin tho’.

Eating for health

Most Asian food is healthy. Many spices and ingredients such as turmeric, garlic and ginger have proven health-giving properties. However, with today’s emphasis on weight control I have made modifications in the quantity and type of fat used for cooking. I have found it is possible to get very good results using almost half the amount of fat called for in many traditional dishes.

In the food of Thailand and certain other Southeast Asian countries, lard is used as a cooking medium. In my kitchen I substitute a light vegetable oil. The flavour will be slightly different, but the way it sits on your stomach will be different too. If you are battling high cholesterol, when using coconut milk cut down on the quantity and substitute a similar amount of skim milk.

All of these recipes are adaptable to low-fat diets with very little sacrifice of flavour, since most of the exotic tastes come from herbs, spices and sauces.

Cooking with a wok

If I had to choose one cooking pan to be marooned on a desert island with, I'd choose a wok. It would cope with any kind of food that happened to be available. In it you can boil, braise, fry and steam, and while you can do all these things in pans you already possess, the wok is almost indispensable for the stir-frying technique that many Asian dishes call for. Because of its rounded shape and high, flaring sides you can toss with abandon and stir-fry ingredients without their leaping over the sides; and because the wok is made of thin iron you get the quick, high heat necessary to much Asian cooking.

Though a wok is best used with gas, it is possible to get good results with electricity. Because quick, high heat is required in stir-frying, turn the hotplate on to the highest heat and place the wok directly on it; it is possible to buy woks with a flat base for better contact, or invest in an electric wok where the heating element is built into the pan. The 30–35 cm (12–14 in) wok is most useful. You can cook small quantities in a large wok, but not vice versa.

The wok made of stainless steel is a modern innovation, but a modestly priced iron wok heats up quickly and evenly and, if you remember to dry it well after washing, it will not rust.

Before use, an iron wok must be seasoned. Prepare it by washing thoroughly in hot water and detergent. Some woks, when new, have a lacquer-like coating, which must be removed by almost filling the wok with water, adding about 2 tablespoons bicarbonate of soda (baking soda) and boiling for about 15 minutes. This softens the coating and it can be scrubbed off with a fine scourer. If some of the coating still remains, repeat the process until the wok is free from any lacquer on the inside. To season the new wok, dry it well, put over gentle heat and, when the metal heats up, wipe over the entire inner surface with some crumpled paper towel dipped

in peanut oil. Repeat a number of times with more oil-soaked paper until the paper stays clean. Allow to cool. Your wok is now ready for use.

After cooking in it, do not scrub the wok with steel wool or abrasives of any kind. Soak in hot water to soften any remaining food, then rub gently with a sponge, using hot water and detergent – this preserves the surface. Make sure the wok is quite dry, because if moisture stays left in the pan it will rust. Heat the wok gently to ensure complete dryness, then rub over the inside surface with lightly oiled paper. A well-used wok will soon turn black, but this is normal – and the more a wok is used, the better it is to cook in.

Deep-frying

A wok is an efficient pan for deep-frying as it has a wider surface area than a regular frying pan. Be sure that the wok is sitting securely on the stove. Fill the wok no more than two-thirds full and heat the oil over medium heat.

To check the temperature for deep-frying, use a kitchen thermometer if you have one – on average, 180°C (350°F) is the correct temperature. To test without a thermometer, a cube of bread dropped into the oil will brown in 15 seconds at 180°C (350°F), and in 10 seconds if the temperature is 190°C (375°F).

The higher temperature may be suitable to use for foods that don't have great thickness, such as pappadams or seafood tempura, but if something needs to cook through, such as chicken pieces, use a lower temperature of around 160°C (320°F) – in this case a cube of bread will take nearly 30 seconds to brown. If the temperature is not hot enough, the food will absorb oil and become greasy. If you overheat the oil it could catch fire.

Use refined peanut oil, light olive oil, canola or rice bran oil and lower the food in gently with tongs or a slotted spoon so as not to splash yourself with hot oil. Removing the fried food to a colander lined with crumpled paper towel will help to remove any excess oil.

After cooling, oil may be poured through a fine metal skimmer and stored in an airtight jar away from the light. It may be used within a month or so,

adding fresh oil to it when heating. After a couple of uses, it will need to be disposed of properly.

Coconut milk

I have heard many people refer to the clear liquid inside a coconut as ‘coconut milk’. I have even read it in books. So, at the risk of boring those who already know, let’s establish right away what coconut milk really is. It’s the milky liquid extracted from the grated flesh of mature fresh coconuts or reconstituted from desiccated (shredded) coconut.

Coconut milk is an important ingredient in the cookery of nearly all Asian countries. It is used in soups, curries, savoury meat or seafood mixtures and all kinds of desserts. It has an unmistakable flavour and richness and should be used in recipes that call for it.

When the first edition of this book was published in 1975, the only good way to obtain coconut milk outside the countries where coconuts grow was to extract it yourself. These days coconut milk is widely available in tins from supermarkets. Problematically, the quality between brands varies enormously so it is worth comparing a few brands and checking the ingredients list – it should only have coconut and water in it. It should smell and taste fresh and clean and be neither watery nor solid. It is better to avoid brands that include stabilisers and preservatives. Shake the tin well before opening to disperse the richness evenly throughout. Brands in Tetra Paks tend not to be lumpy or watery.

Delicious as it is, coconut milk is full of saturated fat. With this in mind, I suggest that only when coconut cream is required should you use the tinned coconut milk undiluted. Where a recipe calls for thick coconut milk, dilute the tinned product with half its volume in water (for example, 250 ml/8½ fl oz/1 cup tinned coconut milk and 125 ml/4 fl oz/½ cup water). Where coconut milk is required, dilute the tinned coconut milk with an equal amount of water. Where thin coconut milk is required, dilute the tinned coconut milk with two parts by volume of water (for example, 250 ml/8½ fl oz/1 cup tinned coconut milk and 500 ml/17 fl oz/2 cups water).

If you would like to make your own coconut milk, the extraction method is included below. Traditionally, coconut milk is extracted in two stages – the first yield being the ‘thick milk’, the second extraction producing ‘thin milk’. Use a mixture of first and second extracts when a recipe calls for coconut milk unless thick milk or thin milk is specified. Sometimes they are added at different stages of the recipe. Some recipes use ‘coconut cream’. This is the rich layer that rises to the top of the thick milk (or first extract) after it has been left to stand for a while.

Making coconut milk from scratch

Using desiccated (shredded) coconut

Makes 375 ml (12½ fl oz/1½ cups) thick coconut milk
Makes 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) thin coconut milk

Many cooks use desiccated coconut for making coconut milk. It is much easier and quicker to prepare than grating fresh coconut, and in curries you cannot tell the difference.

180 g (6½ oz/2 cups) desiccated (shredded) coconut
1.25 litres (42 fl oz/5 cups) hot water

Put the desiccated coconut into a large bowl and pour over 625 ml (21 fl oz/2½ cups) of the hot water then allow to cool to lukewarm. Knead firmly with your hands for a few minutes, then strain through a fine sieve or a piece of muslin (cheesecloth), pressing or squeezing out as much liquid as possible; this is the thick coconut milk.

Repeat the process using the same coconut and remaining hot water. This extract will yield the thin coconut milk. (Because of the moisture retained in the coconut the first time, the second extract usually yields more milk.)

Alternatively, to save time, you can use an electric blender or food processor. Put the desiccated coconut and 625 ml (21 fl oz/2½ cups) of the hot water into the blender and process for 30 seconds, then strain through a fine sieve or piece of muslin (cheesecloth), squeezing

out all the moisture. Repeat, using the same coconut and remaining hot water.

Note: *Sometimes a richer milk is required. For this, hot milk replaces the water and only the first extract is used. However, a second extract will yield a flavoursome and reasonably rich grade of coconut milk that can be used in soups, curries or other dishes.*

Using fresh coconut

Makes 375 ml (12½ cups) thick coconut milk
Makes 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) thin coconut milk

In Asian countries, fresh coconut is used and a coconut grater is standard equipment in every household. Grating fresh coconut is easy if you have the right implement for the job. However, if you are able to get fresh coconuts and do not have such an implement, use a food processor to pulverise the coconut and then extract the milk.

1 fresh coconut
1 liter (34 fl oz/4 cups) water or milk

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F). Crack the coconut in half by hitting it with the back of a heavy kitchen chopper. Once a crack has appeared, insert the thin edge of the blade and prise it open. Save the sweet liquid inside for drinking. If you do not own a coconut grater, put the two halves on a baking tray and bake in the oven for 15–20 minutes, or until the flesh starts to come away from the shell. Lift it out with the point of a knife, and peel away the thin dark brown skin that clings to the white portion. Cut into chunks.

Put the coconut flesh into a food processor with 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) of the water and process until the coconut is completely pulverised. Strain the liquid using a sieve or muslin (cheesecloth) to extract the thick coconut milk. Repeat this process using the same coconut and remaining water to extract the thin milk. Left-over freshly extracted or bought coconut milk may be frozen – ice cube trays are ideal.

Chillies

Fresh chillies are used in most Asian food, particularly that of Southeast Asia. If mild flavouring is required, simply wash the chilli and add it to the dish when simmering, then lift out and discard the chilli before serving. But if you want the authentic fiery quality of the dish, you need to seed and chop the chillies first. To do this, remove the stalk of each chilli and cut in half lengthways to remove the central membrane and seeds – the seeds are the hottest part of the chilli.

If you handle chillies without wearing gloves, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water afterwards. Chillies can be so hot that even two or three good washings do not stop the tingling sensation, which can go on for hours. If this happens, remember to keep your hands well away from your eyes, lips or where the skin is especially sensitive. If you have more chillies than you need, they can be wrapped in plastic wrap and frozen, then added to dishes and used without thawing.

Dried chillies come in many shapes and sizes. Generally I use the large variety. If frying them as an accompaniment to a meal, use them whole, dropping them straight into hot oil. If they are being soaked and ground as part of the spicing for a sauce or curry, first cut off the stalk end and shake the chilli so that the seeds fall out. They are safe enough to handle until they have been soaked and ground, but if you handle them after this has been done, remember to wash your hands at once with soap and water.

Dried chillies, though they give plenty of heat and flavour, do not have the same volatile oils as fresh chillies and so do not have as much effect on the skin.

Rice varieties

One of the oldest grains in the world, and a staple food of more than half the world's population, rice is by far the most important item in the daily diet throughout Asia.

There are thousands of varieties. Agricultural scientists involved in producing new and higher yielding strains of rice will pick differences that

are not apparent to even the most enthusiastic rice eater. But, from the Asian consumer's viewpoint, rice has qualities that a Westerner might not even notice – colour, fragrance, flavour, texture.

Rice buyers are so trained to recognise different types of rice that they can hold a few grains in the palm to warm it, sniff it through the hole made by thumb and forefinger, and know its age, variety, even perhaps where it was grown. Old rice is sought after and prized more than new rice because it tends to be fluffy and separate when cooked, even if the cook absent-mindedly adds too much water. Generally speaking, the white polished grains – whether long and fine or small and pearly (much smaller than what we know as short-grain rice) – are considered best.

The desirable features of rice are not the same in every Asian country. In Burma, fluffy, dry rice is preferred. Long, thin grains are considered best and rice is cooked with salt. The most dreadful thing a cook could do is forget to salt the rice.

In Thailand and Vietnam, rice is preferred dry and separate, but it is cooked without salt.

Further east, medium- or short-grain varieties come into their own. In Laos and Cambodia they prefer rice that is perfectly cooked but not dry and fluffy. Glossy, pearly grains are desired, each one well defined, but with a tendency to cling together so that it can easily be picked up with chopsticks. Again, no salt is used. Laotians are different from all other rice eaters in that they prefer sticky or glutinous rice to other varieties, whereas in most countries sticky rice is used only for sweets or leaf-wrapped snacks.

Rice is sold either packaged or in bulk. Polished white rice is available as long-, medium- or short-grain. Unpolished or natural rice is available as medium- or long-grain; and in many countries it is possible to buy an aromatic table rice grown in Bangladesh, called basmati rice. In dishes where spices and flavourings are added and cooked with the rice, any type of long-grain rice may be used. In each recipe the type of rice best suited is recommended, but as a general rule, remember that medium-grain or short-grain rice gives a clinging result and long-grain rice, properly cooked, is fluffy and separate.

Preparing rice

To wash or not to wash? Among Asian cooks there will never be agreement on whether rice should be washed or not. Some favour washing the rice several times, then leaving it to soak for a while. Other good cooks insist that washing rice is stupid and wasteful, taking away what vitamins and nutrients are left after the milling process.

I have found that most rice sold in Australia does not need washing but that rice imported in bulk and packaged here picks up a lot of dust and dirt and needs thorough washing and draining.

In a recipe, if rice is to be fried before any liquid is added, the washed rice must be allowed enough time to thoroughly drain and dry, between 30 and 60 minutes. Rice to be steamed must be soaked overnight. Rice for cooking by the absorption method may be washed (or not), drained briefly and added to the pan immediately.

Cooking rice

For a fail-safe way of cooking rice perfectly every time, put the required amount of rice and water into a large saucepan with a tight-fitting lid (see the measures above right). Bring to the boil over high heat, cover, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 20 minutes. Remove from the heat, uncover the pan and allow the steam to escape for a few minutes before fluffing up the rice with a fork.

Transfer the rice to a serving dish with a slotted metal spoon – don't use a wooden spoon or it will crush the grains. You will notice that long-grain rice absorbs considerably more water than short-grain rice, so the two kinds are not interchangeable in recipes. Though details are given in every rice recipe, here is a general rule regarding proportions of rice and liquid.

Long-grain rice

200 g (7 oz/1 cup) rice use 500 ml
(17 fl oz/2 cups) water
400 g (14 oz/2 cups) rice use 875 ml
(29½ fl oz/3½ cups) water
600 g (1 lb 5 oz/3 cups) rice use
1.25 litres (42 fl oz/5 cups) water
Use 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) water for the first cup of rice, then 375 ml (12½ fl oz/1½ cups) water for each additional cup of rice.

Short- or medium-grain rice

220 g (8 oz/1 cup) rice use 375 ml
(12½ fl oz/1½ cups) water
440 g (15½ oz/2 cups) rice use 625 ml
(21 fl oz/2½ cups) water
660 g (1 lb 7 oz/3 cups) rice use 875 ml
(29½ fl oz/3½ cups) water
Use 375 ml (12½ fl oz/1½ cups) water for the first cup of rice, then 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) water for each additional cup of rice.

Noodles

There are many different types of noodles available and different Asian countries have specific uses and preferences. Almost all of these varieties are available from large supermarkets or Asian grocery stores.

Dried egg noodles: Perhaps the most popular noodles, these are made of wheat flour. Dried egg noodles must be soaked in hot water for about 10 minutes before cooking. This is not mentioned in the cooking instructions, yet it does make cooking them so much easier – as the noodles soften the strands spread and separate and the noodles cook more evenly than when they are dropped straight into boiling water.

A spoonful of oil in the water prevents boiling over. When water returns to the boil, cook fine noodles for 2–3 minutes and thick noodles for 3–4 minutes. Do not overcook. Drain immediately, then run cold water through

the noodles to rinse off any excess starch and cool them so they don't continue to cook in their own heat. Drain thoroughly. To reheat, pour boiling water over the noodles in a colander. Serve with stir-fried dishes or use in soups and braised noodle dishes.

Dried rice noodles: There are various kinds of flat rice noodles. Depending on the type of noodle and thickness of the strands, they have to be soaked in cold water for 30–60 minutes before cooking. Drain, then drop into a saucepan of boiling water and cook for 6–10 minutes, testing every minute after the first 6 minutes so you will know when they are done. As soon as they are tender, drain in a colander and rinse well in cold running water. Drain once more. They can then be fried or heated in soup before serving.

Dried rice vermicelli (rice-stick) noodles: Rice vermicelli has very fine strands and cooks very quickly. Drop into boiling water and cook for 2–3 minutes only. Drain well. Serve in soups or with dishes that have a good amount of sauce. Or, if a crisp garnish is required, use rice vermicelli straight from the packet and deep-fry small amounts for just a few seconds. It will puff and become white as soon as it is immersed in the oil if it is hot enough. Lift out quickly on a slotted spoon or wire strainer and drain on paper towels before serving.

Dried cellophane (bean thread) noodles: Also known as bean starch noodles, these dried noodles need to be soaked in hot water for 20 minutes, then drained and cooked in a saucepan of boiling water for 15 minutes, or until tender. For use as a crisp garnish, deep-fry them in hot oil straight from the packet, as for rice vermicelli (above). In Japan they have a similar fine translucent noodle, known as harusame.

Preparing soft-fried noodles

After the noodles have been boiled and drained, spread them on a large baking tray lined with paper towel and leave them to dry for at least 30 minutes – a little peanut oil may be sprinkled over them to prevent sticking. Heat 2 tablespoons each of peanut oil and sesame oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan until hot, then add a handful of noodles and cook until golden on one side. Turn and cook the other

side until golden, then remove to a plate. Repeat with the remaining noodles. It may be necessary to add more oil to the wok if a large quantity of noodles is being fried, but make sure the fresh oil is very hot first. Serve with beef, pork, poultry or vegetable dishes.

Preparing crisp-fried noodles

Rice vermicelli (rice-stick) and cellophane (bean thread) noodles can be fried in hot oil straight from the packet. Egg noodles need to be cooked first, then drained and spread out on a large baking tray lined with paper towel to dry for at least 30 minutes – a little peanut oil can be sprinkled over them to prevent sticking. Heat sufficient peanut oil in a wok or heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the noodles, in batches, until crisp and golden brown. Drain on paper towel. These crisp noodles are used mainly as a garnish.

Preparing whole chickens

Jointing a chicken

I have often referred to cutting a chicken into serving pieces suitable for a curry. This is simply cutting the pieces smaller than joints so that the spices can more readily penetrate and flavour the meat.

To joint a chicken, first cut off the thighs and drumsticks, then separate the drumsticks from the thighs. Cut off the wings and divide them at the middle joint (wing tips may be added to a stock but do not count as a joint). The breast is divided down the centre into two, then across into four pieces – do not start cooking the breast pieces at the same time as the others, but add them later, as breast meat has a tendency to become dry if cooked for too long.

A 1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) chicken, for instance, can be jointed, then broken down further into serving pieces. The thighs are cut into two with a heavy cleaver; the back is cut into four pieces and used in the curry,

though not counted as serving pieces because there is very little meat on them. Neck and giblets are also included to give extra flavour.

Preparing whole fish

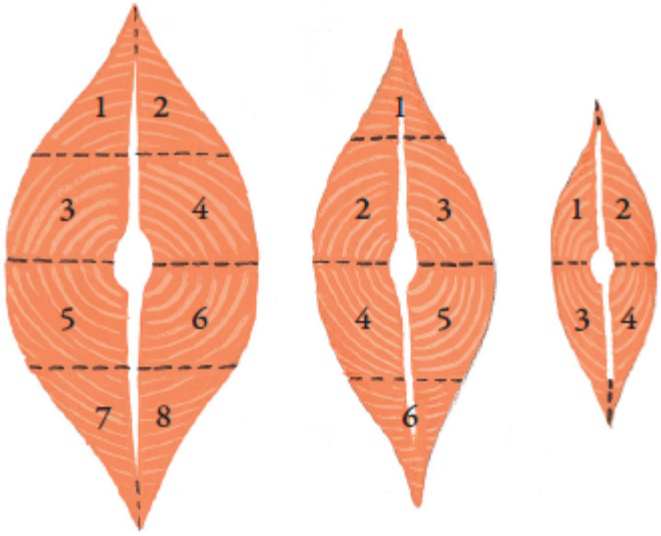
Cutting fish fillets into serving pieces

Fish fillets are of varying thickness, length and density. For example, whole fillets of flathead can be dipped in tempura batter and will cook in less than a minute in hot oil, whereas a fillet of ling or trevalla will need to be cut into 3 cm (1¼ in) strips for the same recipe.

Let common sense prevail when portioning fish fillets, but always remember that fish is cooked when the flesh turns opaque when flaked with a fork or knife.

Cutting fish steaks into serving pieces

Depending on the size of the fish, each steak may need to be cut into four, six or eight pieces. Once again, smaller portions are better, for they allow flavours to penetrate and you can allow more than one piece per person. The accompanying sketch shows how to divide fish steaks – small ones into four pieces, medium-sized ones into six pieces and really large steaks into eight pieces.



Thailand

Thai cooking, like that of the whole of Southeast Asia, is very much a taste-and-add affair. While the results are splendid, it is very difficult to obtain exact recipes because most Thai cooks don't use them. It is best to watch the cook closely, noting every move and taking careful and copious notes.

During my first most enjoyable stay in Thailand I was fortunate to meet and speak with some outstandingly good Thai cooks and learn some of their recipes. One was Mom Luang Terb Xoomsai, a charming and worldly member of the Thai nobility who was famous for her good cooking. Between trips abroad to represent Thailand at food festivals and exhibitions she ran a catering firm and the SEATO canteen.

I lunched at the canteen as her guest, and chose to taste the Thai dishes rather than the European-style food that was also provided. After lunch we sat and talked, then she took me into the kitchen to show me how various things were done. All in all, I have seldom spent so edifying an afternoon.

She pointed out that, like every country, Thailand has a classic cuisine and a peasant cuisine. She uses both, depending on the occasion. The meals in the canteen are, she said, of the peasant style (but delicious, just delicious) and when she catered for parties something grander was usually required. An example of this, being prepared then for a special party the next day, was *lug chup*, which translates as 'small magic' – and that's exactly what it was.

Tiny moulded fruits looking like marzipan fruit, but more delicate, they shone with a glaze that could have been a thin sugar coating at the

brilliantly clear hard-crack stage. However, the fruits were not marzipan but mung bean paste, sweetened with sugar and coloured and flavoured with fresh fruits and vegetables. ‘I would not touch them if they had artificial colouring and flavouring,’ vowed Terb Xoomsai. Nor was the glaze sugar (which would melt in Thailand’s humid climate); the fruits had been dipped in an agar-agar solution to give them a clear and completely non-sticky coating. Tiny natural calyxes from fruits were attached and the whole effect was one of delicacy and beauty.

I also met chef Miki Pichit, chef de cuisine at the Oriental Hotel, one of Bangkok’s oldest and most famous hotels. I had been overwhelmed by his presentation of Thai food at the lavish banquet held to mark the Loy Krathong festival, the biggest celebration of the year. It takes place on the full of the twelfth moon and symbolises the passing of the old and the coming of the new lunar year.

Lotus-shaped *krathongs* or floats made from flowers, leaves, coloured paper and (a modern touch) polystyrene foam to keep them afloat, are sent down the Chao Phraya River, each with lighted candles and incense sticks in them. The lights flickering on the water are a pretty sight, but not many survive more than a short distance downstream where scores of little boys wait in boats to snatch them from the water and profit from the *baht* coins tucked into them by devotees hoping to propitiate the gods.

Because the hotel is right on the river, there is a spectacular celebration held there each year attended by tourists and local society alike. Tableaux presented on an open-air stage tell stories of the grandeur of ancient Siam. Beautiful girls in breathtaking costumes dance traditional dances. There is music and singing, and an interpreter with a microphone translates for the benefit of *farangs*, or foreigners.

Every conceivable dish was displayed at the banquet, both Western and Thai style. Smoked salmon and ham vied for attention with *kaeng* (dishes with gravy) of every kind and such a selection of *krueng kieng* (side dishes) that discretion and diets were cast to the winds. Among the most delicious and curious dishes I tasted was a finely pounded paste of fresh fish seasoned with the ever-present Thai flavouring combination of coriander

(cilantro) roots, peppercorns and garlic ground together. This was steamed in banana leaves that had been cut and curved to look like a flower. I met this combination again at a very exclusive Thai restaurant, when it was steamed in the shape of tiny fish, each one no larger than a thumb, and presented on lettuce leaves as though swimming around the dish.

The sweets of every shape, flavour and hue were as dazzling to the eye as was the display of fireworks on the river. I could not help but wonder how many hours of work had gone into the making of hundreds of tiny baskets made from *bai toey* (pandanus leaves), each holding a mere mouthful of sweets made variously from glutinous rice, yams, agar-agar jelly, mung bean paste, mung bean flour and, of course, the richness of coconut milk and the sweetness of palm sugar (jaggery). I particularly enjoyed the ice cream made from fresh coconut milk. Delicately sweet, ice-cold, creamy but not too rich, it was the perfect ending to a perfect meal. A chef stood by the old-fashioned ice-cream churn, scooping out servings for guests who still had some space left to taste it.

On a tour of the hotel kitchens I met chef Silaprachai, a specialist in fruit carving. If you have not seen fruit as carved by the Thais, you cannot imagine the impact of huge pyramids of melons, papayas, *lamoot* (sapodilla), mandarins, pomelos (Chinese grapefruit), *champoos* (rose apple/jambul) and rambutan all sculpted to resemble flowers. The melons in particular, being large enough to decorate in more elaborate fashion, bore classic designs cut into the skin and in some instances were carved to look like birds, each feather separate and perfect.

It amazes the visitor to Thailand to see the care that goes into even the smallest detail. Even the *krathongs*, to be admired for a few hours and then floated down the river, were formed with such dexterity and attention to detail. Each ‘petal’ of the lotus shapes, approximately a handspan in length, was composed of hundreds of tiny red rose petals, each one rolled separately to form a flaring cone and arranged in perfectly symmetrical rows. These ‘petals’ were then edged with tight white buds of a jasmine-like flower.

Serving and eating a Thai meal

As in the rest of Southeast Asia, Thailand's staple food is rice. The words for rice and food are synonymous and everything else is called 'with the rice'.

Thailand is one of the greatest rice-growing countries in the world and exports of rice account for almost half of the country's export revenue. There are as many, if not more, ceremonial rituals attached to the planting and harvesting of rice in Thailand as there are in other Asian countries, where rice represents life and is revered as such.

To cook rice in the Thai manner, choose jasmine rice, a naturally fragrant long-grain rice or, if unavailable, another long-grain variety of polished white rice. Thai cooks wash the rice several times, but there is no need to do this if the rice is clean, for washing carries away soluble nutrients. It is then cooked by the absorption method.

Another method is to soak the rice overnight, then to drain and steam it. This takes much longer than cooking it directly in the water, but gives a very fluffy and grainy result. However, it must be served directly when it is ready, because it will go hard and dry if left to stand. This method is almost always used with glutinous rice, a special variety much prized in northern Thailand, Laos and other countries in the area. Except in Laos, it is used exclusively in the making of sweets.

A Thai meal is based on rice, but the number and variety of dishes served with the rice is limited only by the cook's time, imagination, patience and budget. It is customary to have a soup, two or more *kaeng* and as many *krueng kieng* as possible. These can be prepared beforehand and served at room temperature. There is not, in Thailand, the Western compulsion to have everything piping hot. Just cook the rice at the last moment so it will be steaming fresh and all will be well.

Modern Thais eat mostly with spoon and fork, though for those who can manage the old-fashioned way, with the fingers, the food does seem to taste even better. Everything is served at once and diners take this or that according to individual taste, combining or tasting separately each dish

against the bland background of rice. Rice in Thailand is never cooked with salt. Seasonings and sauces added later make it inadvisable to cook rice with salt, because the sauces are so strong and salty.

Utensils

You don't need anything very special in the way of equipment to cook Thai food. But, like the cooking of many Asian countries, Thai food uses ground spices and fresh herbs for flavouring and a food processor helps. So does a mortar and pestle for pounding small quantities.

A wok is, once again, the classic shape for the stir-frying technique that is employed in many dishes, so if you enjoy cooking Chinese, Thai, Indonesian or other Asian food, it will be a wise investment.

Fresh ingredients

In addition to the shelf ingredients listed opposite, try to grow lemongrass in your garden. The dried, powdered version pales in comparison. Coriander (cilantro) is essential to Thai food; if you are in an area where you cannot buy it, grow some from seed. Fresh makrut (kaffir lime) leaves add a unique and distinctive flavour to many Thai dishes. Cut into hair-fine strands and sprinkled on top of salads or finished dishes, pounded with other ingredients to make fragrant spice pastes or simmered whole in curries, their contribution cannot be underestimated. Tender leaves from other citrus may be substituted, but the effect is not the same. In addition to these key fresh ingredients, there are three varieties of Thai basil, *kaprow, horapa* and *manglak*, which are widely used and pack a real flavour punch. Get to know them and, if you are an aficionado of Thai cuisine, consider growing them. Likewise, fresh Thai chillies (the smaller and thinner the chilli, the hotter it will be).

Your Thai shelf

black peppercorns, whole
cardamom, whole pods or ground

cellophane (bean thread) noodles
chillies, dried red or powder
cinnamon, sticks or ground
cloves, whole or ground
coconut, desiccated (shredded)
coconut milk and cream
coriander, ground
cumin, ground
dried prawn (shrimp) powder
dried shrimp
dried shrimp paste (kapi)
dried tofu sheets
fish sauce
galangal, fresh or brined
ginger, red pickled
glutinous rice
Green curry paste
green peppercorns, in brine
jasmine or other long-grain rice
kencur (aromatic ginger) powder
laos (dried galangal) powder
lily buds (golden needles), dried
Masaman curry paste
mung bean flour
palm sugar (jaggery) or soft or dark brown sugar
paprika
peanut oil or other vegetable oil
peanuts, raw
Red curry paste
rice vermicelli (rice-stick) noodles
shiitake mushrooms, dried
soy sauce, light and dark
tamarind pulp
tapioca flour
Thai chilli sauce (sriracha)
turmeric, ground

wood ear fungus, dried
yellow bean sauce (taucheo)

Pastes, Rice, Noodles and Starters

Krung Kaeing Khieu Wan
Green curry paste

Coriander (cilantro) is a herb that is prone to collect sand. Wash it very thoroughly, especially the roots and stems where they join the plant, as this is where most soil collects.

Makes: 1 cup

4 large fresh green chillies
1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
8 red Asian shallots or 1 small brown onion, chopped
1 tablespoon finely chopped garlic
2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves, stem and root
1 stem lemongrass, white part only, finely chopped, or 2 teaspoons finely grated lemon zest
1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons ground coriander
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 slice fresh galangal or 1 teaspoon laos (dried galangal) powder
2 teaspoons dried shrimp paste
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 tablespoon oil

Remove the stems from the chillies and keep the seeds in if you want the curry paste to be hot. Roughly chop the chillies and put into a food processor with the remaining ingredients. Process to a smooth paste, turning off the motor and scraping down the sides until well combined. You may need to add a little extra oil or a tablespoon of water to blend everything together. Store in a sterilised airtight jar in the refrigerator for up to 6 weeks.

Krung Kaeng Masaman
Masaman (Muslim) curry paste

You can make this curry paste two ways – either using the whole spices, roasting and grinding them (you will need a large mortar and pestle for this) or by using ground spices. I have tested this recipe both ways and they are equally successful; already ground spices are a boon when you are pushed for time.

Makes: 1½ cups

7–10 dried red chillies or 2 teaspoons chilli powder
2 tablespoons coriander seeds or ground coriander
1 teaspoon cumin or fennel seeds or ground fennel
2 slices fresh galangal, chopped, or 2 teaspoons laos (dried galangal) powder
5 whole cloves or ½ teaspoon ground cloves
1 cinnamon stick or 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
5 cardamom pods or ½ teaspoon ground cardamom
1 blade mace or ½ teaspoon ground mace
2 tablespoons oil
2 onions, thinly sliced
5 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
½ teaspoon dried shrimp paste
1 teaspoon finely chopped lemongrass or finely grated lemon zest

Break the chillies, shaking out and discarding the seeds, then roast lightly in a dry frying pan. Pound using a mortar and pestle. Roast the coriander seeds until aromatic and dark brown, shaking the pan frequently or stirring. Pound in a mortar until reduced to a fine powder (if spices are pounded while hot they are easily pulverised). Roast the cumin seeds until they crackle and start to pop, then grind to a powder. Add the laos powder to the ground spices.

Parch the whole cloves, cinnamon stick, cardamom pods and mace in a dry frying pan over low heat for a few minutes, shaking the pan. If you separate the cinnamon stick into layers, it will roast more quickly. Grind all the spices using a mortar and pestle to a fine powder and combine with the previously roasted and ground ingredients. Set aside.

Heat the oil in a frying pan over low heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook until soft and golden brown, stirring occasionally. Add the dried shrimp paste and stir-fry for a minute longer, crushing it in the oil with the back of a spoon. Put this fried mixture, when it has cooled slightly, into a food processor with the lemongrass and process to a paste. If using fresh galangal, add at this stage. If necessary, add a little coconut milk or water to assist processing. Turn into a bowl and combine with the dry ground spices. The curry paste is now ready to use.

If using ready-ground spices, dry-roast the ground coriander and fennel over low heat, stirring constantly and taking care they do not burn. Roast until they turn a rich brown and have an aromatic smell. It is not necessary to roast the chilli powder or the other ground spices.

If a food processor is not available, crush the onions and garlic as much as possible after they are cooked, using a mortar and pestle, then combine with the spices.

Krung Kaeng Phed
Red curry paste

This versatile curry paste is suitable for seafood, meat and poultry curries and is also a delicious flavour base for Chilli Fried Rice.

Makes: 1 cup

4–6 dried red chillies
16 red Asian shallots or 2 small brown onions, chopped
1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
2 teaspoons ground cumin
1 tablespoon ground coriander
2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves, stem and root
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons fresh lemongrass, white part only, finely chopped
1 slice fresh galangal or 1 teaspoon laos (dried galangal) powder
1 tablespoon finely chopped garlic
2 teaspoons dried shrimp paste
1 tablespoon oil
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
2 teaspoons paprika

Remove the stems from the chillies and keep the seeds in if you want the curry paste to be hot. Roughly chop the chillies and put into a food processor with the remaining ingredients. Process to a smooth paste, turning off the motor and scraping down the sides until well combined. You may need to add a little extra oil or a tablespoon of water to blend everything together. Store in a sterilised airtight jar in the refrigerator for up to 6 weeks.

Khao Kluk Kapi
Rice with kapi

Serves: 6

1 tablespoon dried shrimp
2 eggs, lightly beaten
80 ml (2 ½ fl oz/⅓ cup) oil
1 tablespoon dried shrimp paste
4–5 large garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 fresh bird's eye or Thai bush chillies (very hot, tiny chillies), deseeded and finely chopped
125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) finely diced cooked pork
1 quantity cold Steamed white rice (opposite)
2–3 tablespoons fish sauce
1 small handful fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves, chopped

Soak the dried shrimp in hot water for 10 minutes. Drain well and finely chop.

Season the egg with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan. Pour in half of the egg to make an omelette, then remove to a plate to cool; do not fold the omelette. Repeat with the remaining egg. When cool, put one omelette on top of the other, roll up and cut into thin strips.

Wrap the dried shrimp paste in a piece of foil and roast under a preheated grill (broiler) for 5 minutes, turning halfway through cooking time.

Heat the remaining oil in a clean wok over low heat. Add the garlic and chilli and cook until the garlic is golden. Add the shrimps and dried shrimp paste and stir-fry for 2–3 minutes. Add the pork and stir-fry for 1 minute, then add the rice and toss together until heated through. Season with the fish sauce to taste.

To serve, pile the rice onto a platter and garnish with the omelette strips and coriander leaves. More hot chillies may be used as a garnish.

Khao Suey
Steamed white rice

Serves: 6–8

500 g (1 lb 2 oz/2½ cups) long-grain rice

Wash the rice well and drain in a colander for 30 minutes. Put the rice and 750 ml (25½ fl oz/3 cups) water into a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to medium and cook, uncovered, until the water is absorbed and holes appear on the surface. Remove from the heat, scoop the rice into a steamer or colander and steam over fast boiling water for 25–30 minutes, or until the grains are tender, yet firm and separate.

If you are looking for a less fiddly method, when the holes appear on the surface, cover the pan with a folded clean tea towel (dish towel) and place a well-fitting lid over the top to seal the pan. Reduce the heat to low and cook the rice for a further 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to stand, covered, for a further 10 minutes.

Khao Phat Prik
Chilli fried rice

The fish sauce and light soy sauce are interchangeable as far as adding salt to this dish, but the fish sauce imparts an additional interesting flavour.

Serves: 4

1 quantity cold Steamed white rice
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) peanut oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
2 fresh chillies, 1 red and 1 green, deseeded and sliced, plus extra to garnish
1 tablespoon Red curry paste
1 pork chop, finely diced
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled, deveined and chopped into pieces if large
2 eggs, lightly beaten
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) fish sauce or light soy sauce
6 spring onions (scallions), chopped
1 handful fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves, chopped
lime wedges to garnish

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based saucepan. Add the onion and chilli and cook until soft. Add the curry paste and stir-fry until the oil separates. Add the pork and stir-fry until cooked, then add the prawns and stir-fry for 1–2 minutes, or until they turn pink.

Add the rice to the wok and toss thoroughly until coated with the curry mixture and heated through. Season the egg with salt and pepper then push the rice to one side of the wok and pour in the egg. Stir until the egg starts to set, then mix through the rice, tossing over high heat until the egg is cooked. Sprinkle the fish sauce evenly over the rice and mix well, then remove from the heat.

Just before serving, stir through the spring onion, then garnish with the coriander leaves, extra chilli and lime wedges.

Khao Phat
Thai fried rice

This dish is a meal in itself. You will get the best results if the cooked rice is still slightly firm with very separate grains.

Serves: 4

1 quantity cold Steamed white rice
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) peanut oil
2 onions, finely chopped
1 large pork chop, finely diced
250 g (9 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined
175 g (6 oz/1 cup) crabmeat
3 eggs, lightly beaten
2 tablespoons fish sauce
1 tablespoon Thai chilli sauce (sriracha) (optional)
2 tablespoons tomato paste
65 g (2¼ oz/1 cup) sliced spring onions (scallions)
1 small handful fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves, chopped

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based saucepan over low heat. Add the onion and cook until soft. Increase the heat to high, add the pork and stir-fry for 3 minutes. Add the prawns and crabmeat and stir-fry for a further 3 minutes, or until the prawns turn pink.

Season the egg with salt and freshly ground black pepper, then push the meat and seafood to one side of the wok and pour in the egg. Stir until the egg starts to set, then mix through the rice and toss until well combined and heated through. Sprinkle the fish sauce evenly over the rice and mix well, then add the chilli sauce and tomato paste and toss thoroughly so the rice has a reddish colour. Remove from the heat.

Just before serving, stir through the spring onion, then garnish with the coriander leaves.

Phat Wun Sen
Mixed fried vermicelli

Serves: 4

250 g (9 oz) rice vermicelli (rice-stick) noodles
10 dried shiitake mushrooms
2 tablespoons peanut oil
3 large garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 fresh red chillies (optional), deseeded and finely chopped
185 g (6½ oz) pork fillet, thinly sliced
250 g (9 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled, deveined and chopped
2 leeks, white part only, thinly sliced, or 6 spring onions (scallions)
1 tinned bamboo shoot, cut into thin matchsticks
2 carrots, cut into thin matchsticks
2 tablespoons fish sauce
1 tablespoon white vinegar
1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons sugar
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
Fried shallots (optional)

Soak the vermicelli in boiling water for 5 minutes, then drain well. Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes, then drain well, cut off and discard the stems and thinly slice the caps.

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over low heat. Add the garlic and chilli and cook until soft. Move to one side of the wok, increase the heat to medium, add the pork and stir-fry for 3–4 minutes, or until cooked. Add the prawns, leek, bamboo shoot and carrot and stir-fry for a further 3 minutes.

Combine all the seasonings, add to the wok, and simmer for 1 minute, then add the vermicelli noodles and toss until well mixed and heated through. Garnish with the coriander leaves and, if liked, fried shallots.

Ma Uon
Fat horses

Somewhat reminiscent of a dim sum filling, but seasoned differently, this combination of pork, chicken and crabmeat is steamed in tiny cups instead of pastry. Chinese wine cups are a suitable size.

Makes: 12–16

125 g (4½ oz) cooked crabmeat
125 g (4½ oz) pork loin, both lean and fat, trimmed and finely chopped
125 g (4½ oz) boneless skinless chicken breast, finely chopped
2 tablespoons chopped coriander (cilantro) leaves, stems and roots
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
5 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tablespoon finely chopped spring onion (scallion)
2 tablespoons fish sauce
2 tablespoons coconut cream
1 teaspoon grated palm sugar (jaggery)
1 large egg or 2 small eggs

Flake the crabmeat, discarding any bony tissue, then chop it finely. Place in a bowl with the pork, chicken, coriander, pepper, garlic, spring onion, fish sauce, coconut cream and palm sugar.

Separate the egg white from the yolk, leaving the yolk in the egg shell. With a small spoon or the end of a chopstick, break up the yolk, then add half of it to the white and beat until foamy. Add to the pork mixture and mix well until all the ingredients are thoroughly combined.

Divide the mixture between twelve or sixteen 60 ml (2 oz/¼ cup) moulds or bowls, pressing firmly, then brush over the top of each with the remaining egg yolk. Steam in a basket over simmering water for 20 minutes, or until no longer pink. Allow to cool, then remove from the cups and serve at room temperature.

Mee Krob
Crispy noodles

The essential feature of this dish is that the vermicelli noodles should be crisp and crunchy. The salty, hot, sweet and sour flavours need no accompaniment.

Serves: 6

200 g (7 oz) rice vermicelli (rice-stick) noodles
750 ml (25½ fl oz/3 cups) peanut oil
125 g (4½ oz) minced (ground) pork or chicken
125 g (4½ oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled, deveined and chopped
185 g (6½ oz/1 cup) finely diced pressed firm tofu
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) white vinegar
75 g (2¾ oz/⅓ cup) sugar
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) fish sauce
3 eggs, lightly beaten
2 whole heads pickled garlic, thinly sliced
3 fresh red chillies, deseeded and sliced
1 handful fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves, chopped
15 g (½ oz/¼ cup) finely chopped garlic chives

Dip the rice noodles briefly in cold water, then shake off any excess water and leave in a breezy place for about 30 minutes. (When fried, rinsed noodles will not puff up as spectacularly as when fried straight from the packet, but will stay crisper for longer.)

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the vermicelli noodles, in batches – they should puff and swell immediately. Remove from the oil using a slotted spoon and drain on paper towel. Allow to cool completely.

Pour off all but 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) of the oil and cook the pork over high heat, stirring until it is no longer pink. Add the prawns and stir-fry for 1

minute, then add the tofu and toss until heated through.

In a bowl, stir together the vinegar, sugar and fish sauce until the sugar has dissolved, then pour into the wok and bring to the boil. Season the egg with salt and freshly ground black pepper and add to the wok, stirring until it is set and firm. Add the fried noodles, pickled garlic and most of the chilli and chopped herbs. Mix well. Garnish with the remaining chilli and herbs and serve immediately.

Ma Ho
Galloping horses

This savoury pork mixture is used as a filling or topping for fresh fruit. The contrasting flavours are deliciously tantalising. Minced (ground) chicken may be substituted if pork is not on the menu.

Serves: 8

5 garlic cloves
4 fresh coriander (cilantro) roots
2 tablespoons lard or oil
250 g (9 oz) pork loin, both lean and fat, trimmed and finely chopped, or use minced (ground) pork
50 g (1¾ oz/⅓ cup) roasted peanuts, coarsely ground
1½ tablespoons fish sauce
⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
120 g (4½ oz/⅔ cup) grated palm sugar (jaggery)
1 fresh red chilli, deseeded and chopped
2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
mandarins, pineapple slices or rambutans to serve

Crush the garlic and coriander roots using a mortar and pestle. Heat the lard in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over low heat. Add the garlic mixture and cook until it turns golden. Add the pork, peanuts, fish sauce, pepper, palm sugar, chilli and coriander leaves and continue to stir-fry until the mixture is well cooked, dark brown in colour and quite dry.

To prepare the fruit, peel the mandarins, removing the white pith, then separate into segments and cut each segment open down the back. Lay them flat on a serving dish. Peel the pineapple, removing the eyes and core and cut into bite-sized pieces. Peel the rambutans and remove the seeds.

Pile the pork mixture on top of the mandarin segments or pineapple pieces, or into the hollow of the rambutans. Serve with rice, or on their own as a

starter.

Note

The closest substitute to rambutans are lychees. Out of season these can be bought in tins – they will need to be drained and the stones removed.

Pratad Lom
Pork and crab balls

Makes: 12

6 large dried tofu skins
175 g (6 oz/1 cup) crabmeat
250 g (9 oz) pork fillet, finely chopped
60 g (2 oz) pork fat, finely chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons lightly beaten egg
1 tablespoon cornflour (cornstarch)
oil for frying

Sauce
2 tablespoons fish sauce
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) white vinegar
2 garlic cloves, crushed
¼ teaspoon salt
2 fresh red chillies, deseeded and finely chopped
¼ teaspoon Sambal ulek

Soak the tofu skins in warm water to soften. Drain well, then cut into twelve 10 cm (4 in) squares.

To make the filling, flake the crabmeat, discarding any bony tissue, then chop finely. Place in a bowl with the remaining ingredients, except the oil, and mix thoroughly. Put a scant tablespoon of the filling on each tofu square, gather up the edges and tie in the middle to form a *pratad lom* (cracker ball) – a plastic-covered wire twist tie is ideal for holding the tofu skins together during steaming.

To make the sauce, combine all the ingredients in a small bowl and stir well to combine. Set aside.

Steam the balls in a basket over simmering water for 10–12 minutes. Allow to cool slightly and remove the twist ties.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the balls, in batches, until crisp and golden. Drain on paper towel. Serve with the sauce.

Note

Won ton wrappers may be used instead of tofu skin, but the texture will be quite different.

Tauhu Sod Sai
Stuffed soy bean cake

Makes: 12

oil for frying
125 g (4½ oz) minced (ground) pork
3 garlic cloves, crushed
¼ teaspoon salt
⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
2 teaspoons fish sauce
12 large deep-fried tofu puffs

Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan. Add the pork, garlic, salt and pepper and stir-fry until well cooked. Add the coriander leaves and fish sauce and stir well to combine. Remove from the heat.

Make a small hole in each of the tofu puffs (the end of a chopstick is useful for this) and stuff some of the pork mixture into the opening.

Heat the oil in a wok over high heat. Deep-fry the stuffed tofu, in batches, until cooked. Drain on paper towel.

Khanom Krok
Crispy rice pancakes

The pan traditionally used to cook these could best compared to an aebelskiver pan or gem scone iron. Cook these delicious little cakes on a gas stove or in a hot oven. In case you think the juxtaposition of sweet and savoury in the topping odd, rest assured that is a part of their charm.

Makes: 24

200 g (7 oz/1 cup) jasmine rice
4 tablespoons cooked rice
60 g (2 oz/1 cup) grated fresh coconut
¼ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon sugar
750 ml (25½ fl oz/3 cups) boiling water
oil for cooking
65 g (2¼ oz/⅓ cup) corn kernels to serve
3 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced, to serve
2 tablespoons pounded dried shrimp (optional) to serve

Topping
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) thick coconut milk
2 tablespoons caster (superfine) sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon tapioca flour

To make the topping, mix together the coconut milk and sugar in a large bowl. Whisk in the salt and tapioca flour until combined.

Combine both types of rice, coconut, salt and sugar in a large bowl, pour in the boiling water and let stand until cold. Place in a food processor and process until ground.

Heat a gem scone iron or aebelskiver pan and brush with a little oil. Half-fill each hollow with the rice batter and cook over low heat for 10 minutes, or until firm. Halfway through cooking, top the pancakes with a scant tablespoon of the coconut milk mixture and sprinkle the top with a little of the corn, spring onion and pounded dried shrimp, if using. Cook until the topping is just set but still wobbly and serve while warm and crisp.

Note

These can also be cooked in a preheated 220°C (430°F) oven for 10 minutes.

Hae Kun
Prawn rolls

Serves: 4

2 large dried tofu skins
250 g (9 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled, deveined and chopped
1 tablespoon cornflour (cornstarch)
2 tablespoons pork fat, finely diced
1 garlic clove, crushed
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
oil for deep-frying

Soak the tofu skins in warm water to soften. Drain well.

In a bowl, combine the prawns, cornflour, pork fat, garlic, ginger, salt and pepper. Divide in 2 equal portions and shape each into a roll. Place each one on a tofu skin and roll up. Steam in a basket over simmering water for 10 minutes. Allow to cool, then cut into slices diagonally.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the prawn rolls, in batches, until golden brown.

Tom Kha Kai
Chicken and coconut milk soup

Serves: 5

1.25 kg (2 lb 12 oz) whole chicken
625 ml (21 fl oz/2½ cups) thin coconut milk
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh galangal or laos (dried galangal) powder
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2–3 fresh coriander (cilantro) roots, crushed
2 stems lemongrass, white part only, sliced
3 fresh green chillies
1½ teaspoons salt
3 makrut (kaffir lime) leaves
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) thick coconut milk
1 tablespoon fish sauce
lime juice to taste
3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

Joint the chicken into portions.

Put the chicken into a large saucepan with the thin coconut milk, galangal, pepper, coriander root, lemongrass, whole chillies, salt and makrut leaves. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer until the chicken is tender, stirring occasionally. Add the thick coconut milk and return to the boil, stirring constantly. Remove from the heat and stir in the fish sauce and lime juice.

Serve the soup in a deep dish or bowl and garnish with the coriander leaves. Accompany with white rice.

Kaeng Chud Dok Mai Chin
Prawn soup with lily buds

Serves: 6–8

90 g (3 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
30 dried lily buds (golden needles)
8 dried shiitake mushrooms
4–5 garlic cloves, chopped
3 whole fresh coriander (cilantro) plants, including leaves and roots
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) peanut oil
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) small raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined, heads and shells reserved
1 onion, thinly sliced
6 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) fish sauce
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
1 teaspoon sugar
2 eggs
3 tablespoons finely chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

Soak the noodles in hot water for 20 minutes, then drain. Cut into 5 cm (2 in) lengths. In a bowl, soak the lily buds and the mushrooms in hot water for 30 minutes. Pinch off the hard ends of the lily buds and tie a knot in each one (this is what the Thais and Chinese do). If you are short on time, cut the buds in half. Cut off and discard the mushroom stems and thinly slice the caps.

Put the garlic and coriander into a food processor with 2 tablespoons water and process to a purée. Set aside.

Heat 1 tablespoon of the peanut oil in a large saucepan over high heat. Add the prawn shells and heads and cook for a few minutes until the shells turn

bright pink. Add 2 litres (68 fl oz/8 cups) water, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes, then strain the stock, discarding the shells.

Heat the remaining oil in a large clean saucepan over low heat. Add the onion and cook until soft. Add the garlic and coriander purée and stir constantly until the oil separates. Add the prawns and cook for 3 minutes, or until they turn pink. Add the hot stock, lily buds, mushrooms and noodles and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 5 minutes, then add the spring onion, fish sauce, soy sauce and sugar. Lightly beat the eggs and pour into the boiling soup, stirring constantly. Remove from the heat. Serve garnished with the coriander leaves.

Kung Tom Yam
Prawn soup

Serves: 6

1 tablespoon oil
1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined, heads and shells reserved
1½ teaspoons salt
2 stems lemongrass, white part only, or 4 strips lemon zest
4 makrut (kaffir lime) leaves
2–3 fresh whole red chillies, plus 1 extra, deseeded and sliced
1 tablespoon fish sauce
2 tablespoons lime juice, or to taste
2 tablespoons chopped coriander (cilantro) leaves
4 spring onions (scallions), finely chopped

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over high heat. Add the prawn shells and heads and cook for a few minutes until the shells turn bright pink. Add 2 litres (68 fl oz/8 cups) hot water, the salt, lemongrass, makrut leaves and whole chillies. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes. Strain the stock, discarding the solids and return the stock to a clean pan.

Bring the stock back to the boil, add the prawns and simmer for 3–4 minutes, or until the prawns are cooked through. Add the fish sauce and lime juice to taste. This soup should have a pronounced acid flavour, so add sufficient lime juice to achieve this.

To serve, sprinkle with the extra sliced chilli, coriander leaves and spring onion.

Kaeng Chud Mu Kai
Pork and chicken soup

Serves: 6

½ small chicken or 2 chicken legs
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) fish sauce
90 g (3 oz/½ cup) grated palm sugar (jaggery)
1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
1 whole coriander (cilantro) plant, including leaves and roots
½ teaspoon salt
90 g (3 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
5 dried shiitake mushrooms
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) Sweet pork (mu wan) in stock
3 tablespoons chopped spring onion (scallion)
3 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
1 fresh red chilli, deseeded and sliced (optional)

Put the chicken into a saucepan with the fish sauce, palm sugar, peppercorns, coriander plant, salt and 1.5 litres (51 fl oz/6 cups) water. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer until the chicken is tender. Strain the stock, reserving 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups). Discard the skin and bones and finely shred the meat.

Soak the noodles in hot water for 20 minutes, then drain. Cut into 5 cm (2 in) lengths. Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes, then drain well, cut off and discard the stems and thinly slice the caps.

Cut half the pork into dice, reserving the remaining pork for use in another dish, or simply serve as sweet pork. Measure 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) of the pork stock.

Put the chicken stock and pork stock in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Add the noodles and mushrooms and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the

chicken and pork, spring onion and coriander leaves and turn off the heat immediately. Serve garnished with the chilli, if desired.

Mains

Pla Nerng
Steamed fish

Serves: 6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
2 dried red chillies
1 teaspoon salt
1 small onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, chopped
½ teaspoon chopped lemon zest
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons fish sauce
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) thick coconut milk
1 egg, lightly beaten
1 large cabbage leaf
1 teaspoon rice flour (optional)
3 tablespoons finely chopped spring onion (scallion)
2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

Wipe the fish with damp paper towel. Cut the fish into 6 serving portions (see preparing whole fish).

Put the chillies, salt, onion, garlic, lemon zest, turmeric, pepper and fish sauce into a food processor and process to a smooth paste. Add 1 tablespoon of the coconut milk if needed.

Put the blended mixture into a large bowl with half of the coconut milk and the egg and mix well to combine. Add the fish, stir gently to coat and leave for a few minutes until the fish absorbs the liquid.

Line a baking dish with the cabbage leaf. Turn the fish and marinade into the leaf. In a separate bowl, mix together the rice flour, if using, with remaining coconut milk and spoon over the top of the fish. Sprinkle with

the spring onion and coriander leaves. Cover the dish and steam over boiling water for about 10 minutes, or until the fish is done. Allow to cool slightly and firm before serving with rice.

Note

If you do not have a steamer, you can steam the fish in a hot oven for about 15 minutes, or until done.

Khieu Wan Pla
Green curry of fish

The double-lobed makrut (kaffir lime) leaf has a very fragrant, distinctive taste. Try to purchase fresh leaves, which may then be stored in the freezer. If you can't get them, substitute tender leaves from other citrus fruit, but the flavour won't be the same. If you live in a temperate climate, ask at the local nursery. You may be surprised to find they have the trees, labelled kaffir lime or Thai lime. They are pretty hardy and reward you with a year-round source of fresh lime leaves.

Serves: 4

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets or steaks
625 ml (21 fl oz/2½ cups) coconut milk
2 tablespoons Green curry paste
2 makrut (kaffir lime) leaves
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1–2 small fresh green chillies, deseeded and chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh basil

Wipe the fish with damp paper towel. Cut the fish into 4 serving portions (see preparing whole fish).

Put the coconut milk in a large heavy-based saucepan with the curry paste, stirring constantly. Add the fish, makrut leaves, salt and fish sauce, reduce the heat to low and simmer for about 15 minutes, or until the fish is cooked through. Add the chilli and fresh basil and simmer for a further 3–4 minutes. Remove from the heat and serve with white rice. If you like a really hot curry, leave the seeds in the chillies.

Pla Tod
Fried fish with tamarind

This dish is traditionally cooked in lard, but a light flavoured oil will work just as well.

Serves: 4–6

1½ tablespoons tamarind pulp
1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) whole fish
lard or oil for frying
3 garlic cloves, crushed
3 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon grated palm sugar (jaggery)
2 tablespoons fish sauce
1 tablespoon finely grated fresh ginger
3 spring onions (scallions), cut into short lengths
3 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
3 fresh red chillies, deseeded and sliced

Soak the tamarind pulp in 80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) hot water for 10 minutes. Squeeze to dissolve the pulp in the water, then strain, discarding the seeds and fibre. Set aside.

Clean and scale the fish, leaving the head on. Wipe inside the fish cavity with damp paper towel that has first been dipped in coarse salt. Trim any long spines or fins neatly.

Heat the lard in a large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Cook the fish on both sides, but do not overcook. Drain on paper towel, cover the fish with foil and keep warm.

Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of the lard and cook the garlic over low heat until starting to brown. Add the soy sauce, palm sugar, fish sauce and

tamarind liquid and bring to the boil. Add the ginger and spring onion and cook for a further 1 minute.

To serve, spoon the warm sauce over the fish and serve garnished with the coriander leaves and chilli, and white rice on the side.

Pla Nam
Fish in red sauce

Serves: 4–6

750 g (1 lb 11 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) oil
2 onions, finely chopped
4 ripe tomatoes, peeled and chopped
2 tablespoons vinegar
2–3 fresh red chillies, deseeded and chopped
3–4 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until soft and golden. Add the tomato, vinegar, chilli and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Cover and simmer for 20 minutes, or until the sauce has thickened.

Add the fish to the wok, cover, and continue simmering until the fish is cooked through. Serve hot, sprinkled with the coriander leaves.

Pla Prio Wan
Whole fried fish with ginger sauce

This is a simple and delicious way of serving fish. Prepare the ingredients for the sauce before you start to cook the fish. The sauce can simmer while the fish is being fried and the dish served immediately when the fish is cooked, while at its best.

Serves: 2–3

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) whole fish, such as snapper, bream or jewfish
flour seasoned with salt
oil for frying
coriander (cilantro) sprigs to garnish (optional)

Ginger sauce
8 dried shiitake mushrooms
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) vinegar
110 g (4 oz/½ cup) sugar
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons finely chopped spring onion (scallion)
1 tablespoon cornflour (cornstarch)
4 tablespoons chopped pickled red ginger

Clean and scale the fish, leaving the head on. Wipe inside the fish cavity with damp paper towel that has first been dipped in coarse salt. Trim any long spines or fins neatly. Cut diagonal slashes in the flesh with a sharp knife, about 2.5 cm (1 in) apart. Dust with the seasoned flour, shaking off any excess.

To make the ginger sauce, soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes, then drain well, cut off and discard the stems and thinly slice the caps.

Put the mushroom, vinegar, sugar, soy sauce and 190 ml (6½ fl oz/¾ cup) water into a small saucepan and bring to the boil for 5 minutes. Add the spring onion.

In a bowl, combine the cornflour and 1 tablespoon cold water, then stir into the sauce. Continue to simmer until the sauce is clear and thickened. Remove from the heat, stir in the ginger and keep warm.

Meanwhile, heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the fish until golden brown on both sides. Drain on paper towel, then carefully transfer the fish to a serving dish, spoon the sauce over the top and serve immediately, garnished with a sprig of fresh coriander, if desired.

Pla Cian
Thai-style fried fish

Serves: 4

750 g (1 lb 11 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
1 teaspoon tamarind pulp
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) peanut oil
6 spring onions (scallions), cut into short lengths
4 garlic cloves, crushed
3 teaspoons finely grated fresh ginger
2 tablespoons light soy sauce
1 tablespoon grated palm sugar (jaggery)
1 tablespoon fish sauce
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
1 fresh red chilli, deseeded and sliced

Wipe the fish with damp paper towel. Cut the fish into serving portions (see preparing whole fish).

Soak the tamarind pulp in 1 tablespoon hot water for 10 minutes. Squeeze to dissolve the pulp in the water, then strain, discarding the seeds and fibre. Set aside.

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the fish and cook on both sides until lightly browned and cooked through. Remove the fish to a serving platter and keep warm.

Add the spring onion to the wok and cook over low heat until soft. Add the garlic and ginger and stir-fry until soft and golden. Add the soy sauce, palm sugar, tamarind liquid, fish sauce and pepper and simmer for 1 minute. Pour the sauce over the fish, garnish with the coriander leaves and chilli and serve immediately with white rice.

Kaeng Phet Kung
Prawn red curry

This curry is even better prepared in advance and re-heated when required. The prawn (shrimp) heads have a wonderful flavour and may be served as part of the curry. Some consider them the tastiest part of the prawn.

Serves: 4

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined, heads reserved
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) coconut milk
2 tablespoons Red curry paste
1–2 tablespoons fish sauce or 1 teaspoon salt
1 fresh red chilli, deseeded

To prepare the prawn heads, rinse and discard only the hard top shell. Set aside.

Put the coconut milk into a large saucepan with the curry paste, fish sauce and chilli. Bring slowly to simmering point, stirring constantly. Add the prawns and prawn heads and cook over low heat for about 15 minutes, stirring frequently, until the prawns are cooked and the flavours mellow. Serve hot with white rice and other accompaniments.

Kai Tod Taucheo
Deep-fried chicken with yellow bean sauce

Serves: 2

1 large boneless skinless chicken breast, cut into cubes
1 tablespoon egg white, lightly beaten
2 teaspoons water chestnut flour or cornflour (cornstarch)
oil for deep-frying, plus 1 tablespoon extra
1 tablespoon yellow bean sauce (taucheo)
1 teaspoon sugar
2 tablespoons Chinese rice wine or sherry
½ teaspoon sesame oil

In a bowl mix together the chicken, egg white and water chestnut flour until well coated.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the chicken, in batches, for a few seconds, or until it starts to change colour. Drain on paper towel.

Heat the extra oil in a clean wok, add the bean sauce and fry for a few seconds. Add the sugar, wine and sesame oil and mix well, then add the chicken, toss to combine and heat through. Serve immediately with white rice.

Kai Kwam
Fried eggs stuffed with pork and seafood

Serves: 8

4 large eggs
70 g (2½ oz/½ cup) chopped raw prawns (shrimp)
85 g (3 oz/½ cup) cooked crabmeat
125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) chopped cooked pork
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
½ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1–2 tablespoons thick coconut milk
oil for deep-frying

Batter
75 g (2¾ oz/½ cup) plain (all-purpose) flour
2 teaspoons oil
¼ teaspoon salt

Put the eggs in a saucepan of cold water and bring slowly to the boil, stirring frequently with a wooden spoon, and being careful not to crack the shells, then reduce the heat to a simmer. Keep stirring until the eggs have been simmering for 3 minutes. This helps centre the yolks, leaving an even layer of white all around, which in turn makes the eggs easier to fill. Simmer for 12 minutes, or until hard-boiled, then run cold water into the pan to cool the eggs quickly.

Peel the eggs and cut in halves lengthways. Scoop the yolks into a bowl and mash thoroughly with a fork. Add the prawn, crabmeat, pork, coriander leaves, pepper, salt and fish sauce. Mix well, then add as much of the coconut milk as the mixture will take and still hold its shape. Divide the

yolk mixture into 8 equal portions and fill the egg whites, shaping the filling into a dome so it takes the shape of a whole egg.

To make the batter, mix together the flour, oil, salt and 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) lukewarm water until smooth.

Heat the oil in a large heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. Dip each egg into the batter, filling side down. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the eggs for 3 minutes, or until golden brown. Drain on paper towel and serve warm or cold.

Kai Yang
Garlic chicken

This may sound like a lot of garlic and pepper, but the result is so unusual and delicious that I hesitate to modify the recipe. The coarsely crushed peppercorns are not as hot as the same amount of finely ground pepper.

Serves: 4–5

1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) whole chicken or 1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) chicken breasts
6 garlic cloves, crushed with 2 teaspoons salt
2 tablespoons whole black peppercorns, crushed
4 whole plants fresh coriander (cilantro), including leaves and roots, finely chopped
2 tablespoons lemon or lime juice, plus extra to taste
1 tomato, sliced, to serve
chilli powder (optional) to taste

Joint the chicken into portions, then cut each chicken breast in half.

In a bowl, mix together the garlic, the crushed peppercorns, coriander and lemon juice until well combined. Rub this mixture over the chicken to coat well on all sides. Cover and set aside for at least 1 hour or longer in the refrigerator.

Cook the chicken on a grill tray under a preheated hot grill (broiler), about 15 cm (6 in) from the heat, turning every 5 minutes, until the chicken is tender and the skin is crisp. Alternatively, cook the chicken on a hot barbecue over glowing coals.

Serve the chicken with boiled rice and the tomato slices seasoned with a pinch of chilli powder, if using, salt and lemon juice to taste.

Kai Phat Khing
Chicken with ginger shreds

Serves: 2

½ cup dried wood ear fungus
2 tablespoons finely grated fresh ginger
1 tablespoon oil
1 small onion, thinly sliced
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 large boneless skinless chicken breast, diced
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 tablespoon vinegar
1–2 teaspoons sugar
1 spring onion (scallion), finely chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

Soak the wood ear fungus in hot water for 10 minutes, then rinse and drain well. Remove any thick or gritty portions and cut into bite-sized pieces. Soak the ginger in lightly salted water for 10 minutes, then squeeze out any excess moisture – this makes the ginger less pungent.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat and cook the onion until soft. Add the garlic and stir until it starts to turn golden, then add the chicken and ginger and stir-fry until the chicken changes colour. Add the soy and fish sauces, vinegar and sugar and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 3 minutes – do not overcook. Just before serving, stir in the spring onion and coriander.

Kaeng Khieu Wan Kai
Green curry of chicken

The green colour is imparted by the finely chopped chillies and fresh herbs added during the last few minutes of cooking. These two ingredients not only give colour, but also a distinctive flavour that distinguishes Thai dishes from other spiced preparations with a coconut milk gravy, all called kaeng for want of a more definitive word.

Serves: 6

1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) whole chicken
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) coconut cream
3 tablespoons Green curry paste
750 ml (25½ fl oz/3 cups) coconut milk
2 makrut (kaffir lime) leaves
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons fish sauce
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh green chillies
4 tablespoons torn fresh basil or chopped coriander (cilantro) leaves.

Joint the chicken into portions.

Heat the coconut cream in a large heavy-based saucepan, stirring constantly until it comes to the boil. Reduce the heat to low and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until the cream thickens and oil bubbles around it – you should be left with 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup). Add the curry paste and cook in the rich oily cream for about 5 minutes, stirring constantly. The curry paste will smell cooked and the oil will separate when it is ready.

Add the chicken and cook over medium–low heat for 15 minutes, stirring frequently and turning regularly until the chicken changes colour. Add the coconut milk, makrut leaves, salt and fish sauce and stir while the coconut milk comes to the boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 35–45 minutes, or until the chicken is well cooked and tender and the gravy rich

and oily. Stir in the chilli and herbs, simmer for a further 5 minutes, then serve with white rice.

Variation

*To make a green curry of duck (*kaeng khieu wan pet*), use a whole duck instead of the chicken and proceed as for green curry of chicken.*

Kaeng Phed Ped Yang Subparot
Thai red curry of duck with pineapple and lychees

The richness of duck is balanced by the tang of fresh pineapple and the sweetness of lychees. It doesn't matter if the pineapple is not very sweet, the lychees will compensate. If you are pressed for time, buy the duck already roasted from a Chinese barbecue shop.

Serves: 6

1 whole duck, uncooked or roasted
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) peanut oil
3 tablespoons Red curry paste
375 ml (12½ fl oz/1½ cups) thin coconut milk
2 tablespoons fish sauce
2 makrut (kaffir lime) leaves, plus extra, thinly sliced, to serve
1 teaspoon grated palm sugar (jaggery)
250 g (9 oz) fresh pineapple, peeled, cored and cut into cubes
150 g (5½ oz) fresh or tinned lychees, stones removed (optional)
fresh Thai basil to serve

Joint the duck into portions (see Preparing whole chickens).

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan. Add the duck, in batches, and cook the duck until brown on all sides. Remove to a plate using a slotted spoon when cooked.

Add the curry paste to the wok and stir-fry until it starts to bubble. Stir in the thin coconut milk, fish sauce and makrut leaves. Mix well and when the sauce bubbles again, return the duck to the wok. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 40 minutes, or until the duck is tender, stirring and turning from time to time to make sure it cooks evenly.

If using an already cooked duck add the duck pieces and turn and cook until just heated through. Add the palm sugar, pineapple and lychees and stir to coat. Garnish with the basil and the extra makrut leaf. Serve with steamed jasmine rice.

Kaeng Masaman
Muslim curry

Chicken or beef may be used in this very spicy curry.

Serves 6–8

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) beef or 1.75 kg (3 lb 14 oz) whole chicken
2 teaspoons tamarind pulp
1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) coconut milk
140 g (5 oz/1 cup) roasted, unsalted peanuts
2 tablespoons fish sauce, plus extra
15 cardamom pods
5 cm (2 in) cinnamon stick
1 quantity Masaman curry paste
2 tablespoons lime or lemon juice
1–2 tablespoons grated palm sugar (jaggery)

Cut the beef into large cubes or Joint the chicken into portions.

Soak the tamarind pulp in 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) hot water for 10 minutes. Squeeze to dissolve the pulp in the water, then strain, discarding the seeds and fibre. Set aside.

Put the beef into a large heavy-based saucepan with the coconut milk, peanuts, fish sauce, cardamom pods and cinnamon stick. Bring to the boil, stirring frequently, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 35–40 minutes, or until the meat is tender. (If you are using chicken use 1.5 litres/51 fl oz/6 cups coconut milk and simmer for 2 hours.) Do not cover the pan or the coconut milk will curdle. When the meat has cooked, remove it to a plate using a slotted spoon.

Continue to simmer the coconut milk in the pan, until it has reduced by about one-third (if it has already reduced considerably then do not cook for any longer). Stir in the curry paste, tamarind liquid, lime juice and palm

sugar. Return the beef to the pan and continue simmering until the sauce has thickened slightly. Taste and add more fish sauce if necessary. Serve with white rice.

Kaeng Phed Nuer
Red curry of beef

Serves: 6

250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) coconut cream
3 tablespoons Red curry paste
1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) stewing steak, cut into cubes
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) thick coconut milk
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) thin coconut milk
2 makrut (kaffir lime) leaves
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons fish sauce
2 fresh red chillies, deseeded and sliced

Heat the coconut cream in a large heavy-based saucepan, stirring constantly until it comes to the boil. Reduce the heat to low and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until the cream thickens and oil bubbles around it. Add the curry paste and continue simmering for 5 minutes, stirring constantly, until the oil starts to separate. Add the steak and stir well, then add the thick coconut milk and thin coconut milk, makrut leaves, salt, fish sauce and chilli and return to the boil, stirring often. Simmer until the beef is tender. If the beef has not become tender and the sauce seems to be cooking away, add a little more coconut milk or hot water – the sauce should be rich and red, and there should be quite a lot of it. Serve with white rice and accompaniments.

Mu Wan
Sweet pork

Sweet pork is mainly used as an ingredient in other dishes, but is also delicious eaten with a hot chilli sauce with rice.

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) pork loin
90 g (3 oz/½ cup) grated palm sugar (jaggery)
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) fish sauce

Remove and reserve the pork rind and cut the meat into thin slices. Put the pork and rind into a saucepan with the palm sugar, fish sauce and 750 ml (25½ fl oz/3 cups) water and bring to the boil. Skim any scum from the surface, then reduce the heat to low and simmer the pork for 30–40 minutes. Uncover and continue simmering until the pork is tender and the fat is translucent, and the rind is very soft. Allow to cool in the stock and use as directed.

Si-Klok
Pork and crab sausage

To make this recipe you've got to have one of two things – lots of patience or an efficient sausage-making machine. I don't have either, but was well into it before I realised I needed them. The sausage is delicious and will spoil you for ordinary sausages for a long time to come, but it does take time and perseverance to fill the sausage skin. (When patience ran out I used the remaining mixture to make tiny balls, fried them in a small amount of oil until well cooked and they tasted great.)

Serves: 4–6

185 g (6½ oz) minced (ground) pork
125 g (4½ oz) crabmeat
2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
2 tablespoons roasted peanuts, coarsely ground
1 tablespoon fish sauce
2 teaspoons Red curry paste
½ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons thick coconut milk
sausage skin (see Note)

Put the pork, crabmeat, onion, coriander, peanuts and fish sauce into a bowl and use your hands to thoroughly combine.

In a separate bowl, combine the curry paste, salt and coconut milk, then add to the pork mixture and continue kneading until very well combined.

Pack the mixture into the sausage skin and fasten both ends firmly with a knot. Prick the sausage in several places with a fine bamboo skewer. Curl the sausage into a large flat coil.

Grill the sausage under a preheated grill (broiler) as far away from the heat as possible for 25 minutes, turning once during cooking, so that the sausage cooks evenly. The authentic method of cooking is to grill the sausage over glowing coals and when cooking is nearly done to sprinkle some of the coconut from which the milk was squeezed, over the coals. This will make smoke which will give more flavour to the sausage. Serve warm or cold.

Note

Sausage skin can be bought from your butcher. Run cold water through the skin before filling with the mixture.

Yam Nang Mu
Pork skin salad

Serves: 6

125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) finely sliced boiled pork rind
125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) finely chopped boiled lean pork
1 large handful fresh mint leaves
1 stem lemongrass, white part only, finely chopped, or ½ teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
3 tablespoons dried prawn (shrimp) powder
2–3 tablespoons coconut cream
1 tablespoon shrimp sauce
1 tablespoon lime juice
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1–2 teaspoons grated palm sugar (jaggery)
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
1 tablespoon chopped spring onion (scallion)

Remove the fat from the pork rind and use only the jelly-like skin.

Mix together the pork and pork rind, mint, lemongrass, prawn powder, coconut cream, shrimp sauce, lime juice, fish sauce and palm sugar in a bowl. Sprinkle over the coriander and spring onion and serve immediately.

Vegetables and Accompaniments

Yam Ma Muang
Green mango or apple salad

In Thailand this would be made with green (unripe) mangoes. If you know someone with a tree, pick some while the skin is green and the fruit too firm to yield to pressure. If hard green mangoes are not readily available, substitute tart green apples.

Serves: 6

2 green (unripe) mangoes or 3 green cooking apples
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon peanut oil
4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
6 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
250 g (9 oz) pork fillet, finely chopped
1 tablespoon dried prawn (shrimp) powder
1 tablespoon fish sauce
2 tablespoons roasted peanuts, crushed
1 teaspoon grated palm sugar (jaggery)
finely chopped fresh red chillies (optional) to serve

If using mangoes, peel off and discard the skin and remove the stones. Coarsely grate the cheeks into long shreds. If using apples, peel and slice them thinly, put them into a large bowl and toss to coat with the salt.

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over low heat. Add the garlic and cook until golden, then remove to a plate. Cook the spring onion until soft, then remove to a plate.

Quickly stir-fry the pork in the wok until cooked, then add the prawn powder, fish sauce, peanuts and palm sugar and toss to combine. Remove from the heat and pour into a large serving bowl to cool slightly.

Just before serving, mix in the mangoes or apple, season with freshly grated black pepper to taste, and sprinkle over the chilli, if desired.

Yum Hoa Plee
Banana flower salad

As banana blossom is more frequently available these days, it is well worth trying it in this salad. Correct preparation is important as merely shredding it and throwing it in a dish will result in a mouth-puckering astringency that will deter any further experiments with this attractive edible blossom. When it is hard to find, you will still have a delicious salad by substituting it with witlof (Belgian endive/chicory) or Chinese cabbage (wombok).

Serves: 6

Banana flower salad
400 g (14 oz) banana flower or witlof (Belgian endive/chicory)
juice of 1 lemon
1 teaspoon salt
30 g (1 oz/½ cup) shredded coconut
1 yam bean (jicama) (glossary), peeled and cut into thin matchsticks
1 large handful fresh mint leaves
1 large handful fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
2 makrut (kaffir lime) leaves, thinly sliced
1 small red onion, quartered and thinly sliced
½ cup fried shallots

Poached chicken
1 coriander (cilantro) stem and root
1 garlic clove, bruised
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 makrut (kaffir lime) leaf, torn
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) chicken tenderloins or 12 raw large prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined

Dressing
60 g (2 oz/⅓ cup) grated palm sugar (jaggery)

2 tablespoons boiling water
2 tablespoons tamarind pulp
1–2 tablespoons chilli jam
2 tablespoons coconut cream

Begin a few hours before serving by removing the leathery outer leaves of the banana flower, keeping 3 or 4 attractive ones to decorate the serving plate.

Pull away the next 6 leaves and discard the small tube-shaped blossoms, but reserve the large petals. Cut the flower in half lengthways then into fine shreds. Combine 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) water with the lemon juice and salt and add the shredded leaves, tossing to coat. Cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours.

To make the dressing, combine the palm sugar and boiling water in a pitcher and stir to dissolve the sugar. Add the tamarind pulp, chilli jam and coconut cream and stir well to combine. Set aside until needed.

To poach the chicken, put 750 ml (25½ fl oz/3 cups) water into a large saucepan. Add the coriander stems, garlic, fish sauce and makrut leaf. Bring to the boil, then add the chicken and bring back to a simmer. Cover, turn off the heat and let sit for 5 minutes, or until the chicken is just cooked through. Remove the chicken from the poaching liquid using a slotted spoon and set aside.

Meanwhile, toast the coconut in a dry frying pan over low heat, watching carefully as it burns without warning. When a rich golden colour, tip onto a flat plate to cool.

Drain the banana flower shreds and place in a large bowl. Add the yam bean, mint, coriander, makrut leaves and onion. Add the fried shallots and coconut and toss to combine.

Pour the dressing over the salad and toss well to coat. Serve the salad on a plate decorated with the reserved outer flower petals, then top with the sliced poached chicken.

Note

If using prawns (shrimp), follow the same method for cooking as for the chicken. Prawns are cooked when they turn opaque and the tails curl.

Yam Som-Or
Pomelo salad

This relative of the grapefruit, also known as Chinese grapefruit, is available in both white and pink varieties. Using both types makes for a very pretty salad. If pomelo is not available, regular grapefruit may be substituted.

Serves: 6

1 pomelo (Chinese grapefruit)
15 g (½ oz/¼ cup) dried shrimp
1 garlic clove
1–2 red chillies, deseeded and thinly sliced
1 tablespoon grated palm sugar (jaggery)
1 tablespoon fish sauce
2 tablespoons lime juice
1 stem lemongrass, white part only, very thinly sliced

Use a sharp knife to peel off the skin and remove all the white pith from the pomelo. Break apart the segments by cutting between the membranes. Discard any seeds.

Lightly toast the dried shrimp in a dry frying pan over low heat. Allow to cool slightly, then transfer to a food processor and process until shredded.

Crush the garlic and half of the chilli using a mortar and pestle, then place in a bowl with the palm sugar, fish sauce and lime juice. Stir to dissolve the sugar, then mix in the shredded shrimp and the lemongrass and pour it onto the bowl of pomelo segments. Arrange on a serving plate and decorate with the remaining chilli slices.

Nam Prik
Thai shrimp sauce

Nam prik in its various versions is what Thais use to season almost everything they eat. Use white rice to provide a neutral background to the pungency of the sauce.

Makes: 1 cup

2 tablespoons dried shrimp
1 teaspoon dried shrimp paste
4 garlic cloves
2 teaspoons Sambal ulek or 2 fresh red chillies, chopped
2 teaspoons grated palm sugar (jaggery)
2 tablespoons lime juice
1½ tablespoons soy sauce

Soak the dried shrimp in hot water for 20 minutes. Drain well.

Wrap the dried shrimp paste in a piece of foil and roast under a preheated grill (broiler) for 5 minutes, turning halfway through. Unwrap and place in a food processor with the dried shrimp, garlic, sambal ulek, palm sugar, lime juice, soy sauce and 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) water and process until smooth. Store in an airtight jar in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

Kapi Pla
Shrimp paste sambal

This is about as pungent as an accompaniment can get. If you want to know the authentic flavour of Thailand, you owe it to yourself to try it.

Makes: 1 cup

3 tablespoons dried shrimp paste
2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
1 tablespoon finely chopped garlic
2 tablespoons dried prawn (shrimp) powder
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) lime or lemon juice
1 tablespoon grated palm sugar (jaggery)
fish sauce to taste
1 teaspoon finely shredded lime or lemon zest
finely chopped fresh red chillies to garnish

Wrap the dried shrimp paste in a piece of foil and roast under a preheated grill (broiler) for 5 minutes, turning halfway through. Allow to cool.

Pound the onion and garlic together using a mortar and pestle, then gradually add the dried shrimp paste, dried prawn powder and lime juice and work into a paste. Add the palm sugar and fish sauce, mixing well to combine. Press into a small bowl or form into a mound and garnish with the shreds of lime zest and the chilli.

Nam Prik Pau
Chilli jam

This is a versatile condiment to have on hand as it doubles as a stir-fry seasoning for greens and can be used in dressings for Thai salads.

Makes: 3 cups

50 g (1¾ oz) large dried red chillies
375 ml (12½ fl oz/1½ cups) boiling water
125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) tamarind pulp
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) vegetable oil
250 g (9 oz) garlic, finely chopped
60 g (2 oz) ginger, peeled and finely chopped
400 g (14 oz) tin chopped tomatoes
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) fish sauce
240 g (8½ oz/1⅓ cups) grated palm sugar (jaggery)

Soak the chillies in 190 ml (6½ oz/¾ cup) boiling water for 20 minutes, or until softened. Drain well and process in a food processor until finely chopped.

Soak the tamarind pulp in the remaining boiling water for 10 minutes. Squeeze to dissolve the pulp in the water, then strain, discarding the seeds and fibre. Set aside.

Place the oil, garlic and ginger into a large heavy-based saucepan and simmer, stirring continuously, for about 10 minutes, or until light golden. Add the tomatoes, fish sauce, palm sugar and tamarind liquid. Cook for 20 minutes over medium heat. Chilli jam can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 6 weeks.

Desserts

Tuptim Grob
Crisp rubies

Tuptim means rubies and grob means crisp or crunchy. These cubes of water chestnuts or yam beans make a delightful dessert. While water chestnuts are mostly available in tins, yam beans (jicama) are seasonally available fresh and providing they are young and sweet are an easy alternative. Nashi pears are also commonly found and give a similar crunchy result.

Serves: 6–8

110 g (4 oz/½ cup) sugar
535 g (1 lb 3 oz) tin whole water chestnuts, drained, or 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) yam beans (jicama) (glossary) or nashi pears, peeled and diced
red liquid food colouring
green liquid food colouring
1 tablespoon rosewater
150 g (5½ oz/1 cup) tapioca flour or potato starch
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) coconut milk
shaved ice to serve (optional)

To make the sugar syrup, put the sugar and 190 ml (6½ fl oz/¾ cup) water into a large saucepan and bring to the boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Remove from the heat and refrigerate until cool. Set aside.

Cut the water chestnuts into quarters. If using yam beans or nashi pear, peel first, then cut into 5 mm (¼ in) dice.

Pour about 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) water into 2 separate bowls and put a few drops of red food colouring in one and green in the other. Add the rosewater to the pink water for flavour.

Place half of the diced water chestnuts into the pink water and half into the green water and leave to soak up the colour for 1 hour. Drain well.

Place the tapioca flour in 2 separate bowls and keeping the colours separate, toss the water chestnuts in each bowl to coat evenly, shaking off any excess.

Bring 2 saucepans of water to the boil and add the pink cubes to one and the green to the other, scooping them into a bowl of iced water when they rise to the surface and the flour coating is translucent. Drain when cool.

Put the green cubes into a serving bowl, then the syrup. Place the red cubes on top. Pour the coconut milk over the top with some shaved ice, if desired. Serve within 4 hours of making.

Khao Nieo Kaeo
Sweet coconut rice

Glutinous, or sticky, rice is a popular Thai dessert. Both white and black sticky rice are used.

Serves: 6–8

500 g (1 lb 2 oz/2½ cups) glutinous rice
625 ml (21 fl oz/2½ cups) coconut milk
120 g (4½ oz/⅓ cup) grated palm sugar (jaggery)

Soak the rice overnight in water. Put the rice and 1.25 litres (42 fl oz/5 cups) water in a saucepan and bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer until the grains are tender and all the liquid has been absorbed.

Add the coconut milk and palm sugar and simmer over low heat, stirring occasionally, until all the milk has been absorbed. Turn onto a plate and flatten with the back of a spoon. Allow to cool and set, then cut into diamond shapes. Serve as a dessert or snack with sliced ripe bananas or Coconut and palm sugar sweet (*na kachik*) (below).

Na Kachik
Coconut and palm sugar sweet

A filling or topping for sweet coconut rice, above, or simply serve with rice.

Serves: 6–8

90 g (3 oz/½ cup) grated palm sugar (jaggery)
240 g (8½ oz/4 cups) freshly grated coconut
1 pinch of salt

Put the palm sugar and 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) water into a small saucepan and bring to the boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar. Add the coconut and salt and stir until the mixture thickens. If this is to be used as a filling, it should be stiff enough to hold its shape in a spoon.

Note

Instead of fresh coconut you can use 90 g (3 oz/1 cup) desiccated (shredded) coconut that has first been soaked in 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) hot milk.

Khanom Talai
Steamed coconut milk pudding

Very reminiscent of a Sri Lankan sweet called seenakku, this steamed pudding made from coconut milk and rice flour sweetened with palm sugar (jaggery) is a simple dessert. Yet, when made in Thailand, the coconut milk is extracted using scented water … water infused with jasmine or other sweet-smelling blossoms, a romantic and fanciful notion so typical of the imaginative and inspired nature of Thai cuisine.

Makes: 10 small serves

125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) coconut cream
2½ tablespoons rice flour
60 g (2 oz/⅓ cup) finely chopped palm sugar (jaggery)
190 ml (6½ fl oz/¾ cup) thick coconut milk
1 pinch of salt

Mix together the coconut cream with 1 tablespoon of the rice flour in a bowl, stirring until smooth. Set aside.

In another bowl, dissolve the palm sugar in the coconut milk and stir in the salt.

Put the remaining rice flour in a third bowl and gradually add the sweetened coconut milk mixture, stirring until smooth. Strain through a fine sieve, then pour into ten 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) capacity moulds or cups so they are two-thirds full.

Set the cups carefully in a steamer basket over simmering water and steam for 15 minutes, or until set. Pour enough of the reserved coconut cream to almost fill each mould, cover, and steam for a further 20–25 minutes. Allow to cool and serve at room temperature.

Sankhaya
Steamed custard in pumpkin shell

This custard may also be steamed in young coconuts, husks removed and the shell cut straight across the top. This quantity fills a medium-sized butternut pumpkin (squash). For a large pumpkin, double the quantities.

Serves: 4–6

190 ml (6½ fl oz/¾ cup) thick coconut milk
90 g (3 oz/½ cup) grated palm sugar (jaggery)
3 eggs, lightly beaten
a few drops of rosewater
1 butternut or small jap (kent) pumpkin (squash)
sweetened coconut milk to serve (optional)

If possible, extract the coconut milk using freshly grated coconut and scented water (coconut milk), which is how this custard would be made in Thailand. Otherwise use the normal method of extracting milk from desiccated (shredded) coconut, using milk instead of water since it should be very rich.

Combine the palm sugar and egg in a bowl, add the coconut milk and stir until the sugar has dissolved. Add just enough of the rosewater to taste.

Wash the pumpkin well and, if it is a large round one, cut a hole in the top and remove all the seeds and spongy tissue, scraping well with a spoon to leave the pumpkin smooth. If it is a long straight pumpkin, cut off the top and then cut a round hole into the centre to remove the seeds and spongy tissue, leaving a shell of pumpkin about 2.5 cm (1 in) thick. Cut a thin slice off the bottom so it has a flat base to sit on in the steamer.

Strain the custard and pour into the pumpkin to come just to the top. Put the pumpkin in a dish so that it fits snugly and put the dish and pumpkin in a

steamer. Steam for 1 hour, or until a knife inserted in the centre of the custard comes out clean.

Cool, then chill and serve the pumpkin, cut into slices so that there is a portion of custard surrounded by pumpkin. Run a knife around the edge of each slice and remove the skin. Serve with sweetened coconut milk for pouring over, if desired.

Khanom Bualoi
Golden bean cakes

This mung bean mixture can be modelled into tiny fruit shapes and painted with food colouring. Either roll in caster (superfine) sugar or dip in an agar-agar glaze for traditional looking lug chup.

Serves: 8–10

250 g (9 oz) mung beans
220 g (8 oz/1 cup) sugar, plus 75 g (2¾ oz/⅓ cup) extra
caster (superfine) sugar to coat

Soak the mung beans in cold water for 24 hours, then change the water several times and wash the beans so that all the green skins float away. Drain well.

Put the mung beans into a saucepan with enough water to just come level with the beans and bring to the boil. Cook until the beans are very soft. Drain well and, while the beans are still hot, mash to a smooth paste.

Put the sugar and 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) water in a heavy-based saucepan over medium heat and stir until the sugar has dissolved. Add the bean paste and cook, stirring occasionally at the start and more frequently as the mixture thickens. When the bean mixture is thick and starts to come away from the side of the pan, it is ready. Allow to cool until it can be handled, and make small balls from the paste.

Put the extra sugar and 1 tablespoon water into a large saucepan and bring to the boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar and cook over gentle heat until the syrup spins a thread.

Dip each ball in the sugar syrup, then toss in the caster sugar to coat and set aside to dry. Place in small paper cases, to serve.

Note

For lug chup, *add 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) thick coconut milk to the mashed mung bean mixture and cook over medium heat, stirring until it clings together and comes away from the side of the pan. When cool enough to handle, form into balls about the size of a macadamia nut, then mould into desired fruit shapes. Insert one end of a toothpick into the fruit and the other into polystyrene foam. Paint with food colouring and allow to cool. Put 3 teaspoons agar-agar powder and 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) water in a saucepan and stir over low heat until dissolved. Cool slightly and dip the fruits, then allow to dry. A second coat, after the first has dried, gives a super shiny result.*

I-Tim Kati
Coconut ice cream

The taste of this ice cream whisks me back in time to a memorable evening at the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok. Served fresh from the churn at the end of a lavish meal, its icy coldness was much appreciated by guests at the festive celebrations of the Loy Krathong festival.

Serves: 6–8
2 teaspoons powdered gelatine
55 g (2 oz/¼ cup) sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) coconut milk
200 ml (7 fl oz) tinned condensed milk
15 g (½ oz/¼ cup) shredded coconut, lightly toasted (optional)

Sprinkle the gelatine over 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) water in a heatproof bowl and leave for 15 minutes to soften.

Put 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) water into a large saucepan with the sugar and salt and bring to the boil, stirring until the sugar has dissolved. Stir the gelatine mixture into the hot syrup until completely dissolved.

Put the coconut milk into a large bowl and add the gelatine syrup and the condensed milk, whisking lightly until well combined. Transfer to an ice-cream machine and churn according to the manufacturer's instructions. Transfer into a freezer container and freeze until required.

If no churn is available, partly freeze in a freezer container until it is a slushy consistency then break up the ice crystals by blending with a hand mixer or stick blender before freezing it again.

Remove from the freezer and refrigerate for 5 minutes to soften before serving. Garnish with the toasted shredded coconut, if desired.

Narayana Bantom Sindhu
Vishnu in the sea of milk

A sweet ice-cold drink that is most refreshing in Thailand's hot climate. Use scented water, as the Thais do, by soaking jasmine flowers or roses in water overnight (or substitute rosewater) for flavouring the cooked mixture and for scenting the water used to extract the coconut milk. This is popularly known as sa rim.

Serves: 6–8

2 tablespoons mung bean flour (glossary)
2–3 teaspoons rosewater, or to taste
green food colouring
55 g (2 oz/¼ cup) sugar
1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) coconut milk
crushed ice

Put the bean flour and 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) water in a saucepan and bring to the boil, stirring constantly until the mixture thickens and becomes clear. Remove from the heat, then stir in the rosewater to give a faint but definite flavour.

Tint the mixture a delicate shade of green, then push through a colander into a bowl of cold water. Leave until firm, drain and refrigerate until chilled.

Put the sugar in a bowl with the coconut milk and stir well to dissolve. Add a little rosewater and refrigerate until chilled.

When you are ready to serve, put a large spoonful of the bean flour mixture into a tall glass, fill with the flavoured coconut milk and crushed ice and serve immediately.

Khao Niew Dum
Black sticky rice

Serves: 4–6

200 g (7 oz/1 cup) black glutinous rice
¼ teaspoon salt, plus ½ teaspoon extra
60 g (2 oz/⅓ cup) grated palm sugar (jaggery), plus extra to serve
2 tablespoons lightly toasted sesame seeds
60 g (2 oz/1 cup) grated fresh coconut, plus extra to serve
coconut cream to serve (optional)

Soak the rice in water overnight, then drain well, reserving 190 ml (6½ fl oz/¾ cup) of the soaking water.

Put the rice and salt into a heatproof bowl. Pour enough water into a large saucepan to come 2 cm (¾ in) up the sides and place a trivet in the pan. Put the bowl of rice on the trivet then bring to the boil and cook for 45–60 minutes, refreshing the water from time to time so it doesn't boil dry.

Remove from the heat and while the rice is still warm, stir through the palm sugar to dissolve.

Meanwhile, lightly bruise the sesame seeds with the extra salt using a mortar and pestle.

To serve, either divide the rice between the holes of a lightly oiled muffin tin to make attractive individual serves, or simply scoop out of the cooking vessel with a wet spoon to prevent the grains sticking to it and serve in small bowls. Garnish with grated coconut, sesame seeds and extra grated palm sugar, if desired. Drizzle with coconut cream, if desired.

Note

Instead of cooking the rice this way you can cook it in a rice cooker – use 750 ml (25½ fl oz/3 cups) water for 1 cup of soaked rice.

Vietnam

While the food of Vietnam has been undeniably influenced by the cooking of China, it could not be mistaken for Chinese food, for authentic Vietnamese food has a very distinctive character. Fish sauce, nuoc mam, replaces soy sauce where saltiness is required, and is added both during cooking and as an accompaniment. Nuoc mam sauce (or nuoc cham), which is served as an accompaniment with practically everything, is based on nuoc mam with the addition of fresh chillies, garlic, sugar, lime or lemon and vinegar. The flavour is sharper and more pungent than any of the sauces you'd come across in Chinese cuisine.

Rice and noodles are the staple starches in the Vietnamese diet, but they have also cultivated a taste for French bread and I'm sure the Vietnamese bakeries in this country turn out the lightest, crunchiest baguettes outside of France. For a quick snack, they're turned into tasty treats with beef, cooked Vietnamese-style, pâté or pressed pork sausage, chilli, fresh coriander (cilantro) and, of course, fish sauce. A delicious meal on the run.

Serving and eating a Vietnamese meal

Together with rice, soup is a basic item in a Vietnamese meal. Sometimes the meal is only a soup – but with the addition of a number of substantial ingredients. Like the Burmese with their national soup dish, *moh hin gha*, the Vietnamese will stop at any time of day or night to partake of a bowl of

pho (pronounced ‘far-uh’ with a rising inflection and a glottal stop at the end), a delicate beef soup that most Westerners would enjoy (see Beef soup with salad). The long simmering gives a strong, nourishing stock and the inclusion of star anise gives it a fragrant aroma. Serve pho together with cooked rice noodles, a wedge of lemon, raw vegetables and zesty fresh herbs, along with your choice of raw or slightly cooked thinly sliced beef, although I have also tasted versions with chicken, which are just as tasty.

Rice is cooked by the absorption method, without salt. It is meant to be firm and separate, the grains having just enough cling so they can be picked up easily with chopsticks. Pot-roasted rice, a simple variation, has a flavour all its own and is considered a treat. It is easy to prepare and this method of cooking rice results in a drier and fluffier consistency. A fluffy consistency is desirable in Vietnamese cooking.

Chicken, fish, poultry and beef are all used in Vietnam, but not mutton (or lamb). Beef too is something of a luxury, for cattle are working animals. Pork is the most common meat. Chickens and ducks are reared and considered good investments because they produce eggs and provide meat. Fish and shellfish are common and cheap, for they are found in great abundance, even in the flooded rice paddies. They are used in many ways, but the most important use is in the making of nuoc mam or fish sauce, for which a tiny fish called ‘rice fish’ is used. These fish are so small that they are likened to grains of rice.

Salads are popular in Vietnam. Simple combinations such as cooked chicken and shredded cabbage are given an exotic touch by the addition of chopped mint and fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves.

Vietnamese food includes a lot of fresh, uncooked vegetables and fruit, and food is more often cooked in water than oil – two reasons why a Vietnamese meal does not bring on a feeling of surfeit. Bowls and chopsticks are used to set the table and all the food is served at one time.

Desserts are not served at the end of a Vietnamese meal, but sweets and cakes are served as between-meal snacks, and offered to guests.

Utensils

To cook Vietnamese-style, a wok is fundamental. You could invest in a heavy stone mortar and pestle, but for most grinding a food processor prepares ingredients with much less time and effort. The one recipe I feel needs a mortar and pestle is nuoc cham. The liquid becomes too frothy when a blender is used, so depending on how enthusiastic you are and how authentic you want the food to be, choose your method of pulverising chillies and garlic accordingly. Wooden chopsticks are used for stirring and mixing. A large, heavy frying pan, a steamer and a large pot will equip you for any of these recipes.

Your Vietnamese shelf

This is a list of spices, sauces, sambals and other flavourings which are often used in Vietnamese cooking and good to have on hand to make the recipes in this chapter.

bamboo shoots, tinned
black pepper, whole and freshly ground
cellophane (bean thread) noodles
cinnamon sticks
coconut milk and cream
cornflour (cornstarch)
daun salam leaves (glossary)
dried shrimp paste
fish cakes, Chinese-style
fish sauce
lily buds (golden needles), dried
lotus root, frozen
oyster sauce
peanut oil
peanuts, raw unsalted
rice paper wrappers
rice, medium-grain
rice, toasted ground (glossary)

rice wine or dry sherry
sesame oil
sesame sauce or paste
sesame seeds
shiitake mushrooms, dried
spring roll wrappers
star anise
turmeric, ground

Snacks, Starters and Soups

Tôm Vó Viên Chiên
Fried prawn cakes

Serves: 4–6 as a meal with rice and soup

1 spring onion (scallion), finely chopped
1 pinch of freshly ground black pepper
oil for deep-frying
Nuoc cham to serve

Prawn paste
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined
1 egg white
60 g (2 oz/¼ cup) finely chopped pork fat
1 tablespoon oil
1 tablespoon fish sauce
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sugar
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

To make the prawn paste, put the prawns through a mincer (grinder) using a fine blade (you will need to do this twice), or chop very finely in a food processor. Add all the remaining ingredients and stir well to combine.

Mix the prawn paste with the spring onion and pepper and stir to combine, then take a little of the mixture at a time and use lightly oiled hands to form into small patties.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the shrimp cakes, in batches, for about 3 minutes each, or until golden and crisp. Drain on paper towel and serve hot with rice, soup and nuoc cham.

These cakes are also suitable for serving as appetisers with lettuce leaves and chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) or mint. Wrap in lettuce, adding a

sprinkling of herbs and dip in nuoc cham. Eat immediately. The mixture may also be barbecued over coals or grilled on sticks of sugar cane.

Cha Giò
Fried pork and crab rolls

If Vietnamese rice papers (banh trang) are difficult to find, use Chinese spring roll wrappers which are sold frozen in supermarkets and in many Asian grocery stores.

Makes: about 24

25 g (1 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
1 small onion, finely chopped
6 spring onions (scallions), finely chopped
250 g (9 oz) minced (ground) pork
175 g (6 oz/1 cup) crabmeat, flaked
½ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon fish sauce
½ teaspoon ground black pepper
12 rice paper wrappers
oil for deep-frying
lettuce leaves to serve
fresh mint or coriander (cilantro) leaves to serve
strips of cucumber to serve
Nuoc cham to serve

Soak the noodles in hot water for 20 minutes, then drain. Cut into 2.5 cm (1 in) lengths. Put into a bowl with the onion, spring onion and pork. Flake the crabmeat, discarding any bony tissue, then add to the bowl with the salt, fish sauce and pepper. Mix well to combine.

Moisten each rice paper by dipping briefly in warm water, then cut in half. Put 2 teaspoons of filling on one end. Roll up, turning in the sides so that the filling is completely enclosed. Moisten the edge with a little water or egg white to secure.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the pork and crab rolls, in batches, until they are crisp and golden. Do not have the oil too hot or the filling will not cook through. Drain on paper towel.

To serve, wrap each roll in a lettuce leaf including a small sprig of mint or coriander and a strip of cucumber. Dip in nuoc cham and eat right away.

Note

Briefly dip the rice paper wrappers in water to soften. You need them to be just pliable, not soggy, before filling and wrapping.

Com Chiên
Pot-roasted rice

With short- or medium-grain rice, the amount of water in this recipe gives a dry, fluffy result, with firm grains. If using long-grain rice, add 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) hot water for the same result, because the long-grain variety has a greater absorbency.

Serves: 4

440 g (15½ oz/2 cups) medium-grain rice
2 tablespoons peanut oil or lard
Nuoc cham to serve

Wash the rice well and drain in a colander for 30 minutes.

Heat the peanut oil in a large heavy-based saucepan over low heat. Add the rice, stirring gently with a metal spoon, for 10–15 minutes, or until the rice becomes opaque and turns golden. Add 435 ml (15 fl oz/1¾ cups) hot water, bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook for 20 minutes, or until fluffy. Serve with the nuoc cham and other dishes.

Bánh Mi Chiên Tôm
Prawn toast

Makes: 24 pieces

12 slices 2-day-old bread
1 quantity Prawn paste
oil for deep-frying
lettuce leaves
Nuoc cham to serve
fresh coriander (cilantro) or mint leaves to serve
cucumber slices to serve

Trim the crusts off the bread and cut each slice into halves lengthways. Spread the prawn paste over each slice.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the bread, paste side down, in batches, until crisp and golden. Drain on paper towel. Serve hot, with the lettuce leaves for wrapping, nuoc cham for dipping and coriander or mint leaves and cucumber slices as accompaniments.

Banh Xeo
Crisp rice flour pancakes

Serve these pancakes either whole or in pieces, wrapped in lettuce leaves and dipped in nuoc cham sauce.

Makes: 6

130 g (4½ oz/¾ cup) rice flour
35 g (1¼ oz/¼ cup) plain (all-purpose) flour
2 tablespoons ground rice
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
½ teaspoon salt
100 ml (3½ fl oz) coconut cream
2 eggs

Filling
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) oil
3 garlic cloves
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled, deveined and halved lengthways
4 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
150 g (5½ oz) cooked pork loin, thinly sliced
90 g (3 oz/1 cup) fresh bean sprouts, trimmed

Combine the flours, ground rice, turmeric and salt in a bowl. Add the coconut cream, eggs and 200 ml (7 fl oz) water and whisk until just combined. Leave to stand for 30 minutes and then test the consistency which should be similar to pouring (single/light) cream. If it is too thick, add extra water to achieve the desired consistency.

To make the filling, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a small frying pan over high heat. Add the garlic and prawns and stir-fry until the prawns start to turn pink. Transfer to a plate, then arrange the remaining ingredients within reach of where you are going to cook the pancakes.

When you are ready to serve, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ v cup) of pancake batter and swirl quickly to cover the base of the pan. Over one half, quickly scatter the prepared filling ingredients starting with the spring onions, then the prawns, pork and bean sprouts and cook until the base starts to crisp and brown. Fold the empty half over and slide onto a serving plate. Repeat with the remaining oil and pancake batter and serve immediately.

Gai Nuong La Chanh
Chicken skewers with lime leaves

Makes: about 12 skewers

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 stem lemongrass, white part only, finely chopped
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped spring onion (scallion)
1 small red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped
2 teaspoons grated palm sugar (jaggery) or soft brown sugar
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon fish sauce
4 makrut (kaffir lime) leaves, plus 16 extra
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) boneless skinless chicken thighs, diced into 5 cm (2 in) pieces
200 g (7 oz) rice vermicelli (rice-stick) noodles to serve

Soak 12 bamboo skewers in water to prevent them from burning during cooking.

Put the vegetable oil, lemongrass, garlic, spring onion, chilli, palm sugar, pepper, fish sauce and makrut leaves in a food processor and process well to combine. Pour over the chicken and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or overnight to marinate.

Soak the rice vermicelli noodles in hot water for 10 minutes, then drain well and keep warm.

Thread 4 pieces of chicken onto each skewer, alternating with the extra lime leaves. Cook under a preheated grill (broiler), or chargrill pan over high heat, turning a few times, until golden and cooked through. Serve with the rice vermicelli noodles.

Goi Cuon
Fresh spring rolls

The secret of good rice paper rolls is not to soak the papers too long, or to fill them too much as they will be limp and likely to burst open. Within a minute of soaking, the rice paper wrappers become pliable enough to roll.

Makes: 8 rolls

100 g (3½ oz) rice vermicelli (rice-stick) noodles
20 g (¾ oz/1 cup) mixed fresh herbs, such as coriander (cilantro), Thai basil and mint leaves
150 g (5½ oz) pork loin
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 teaspoon sugar
8 cooked large prawns (shrimp), peeled, deveined and halved lengthways
8 soft lettuce leaves
8 rice paper wrappers
1 handful garlic chives

Soak the rice vermicelli noodles in hot water for 10 minutes, then drain well and cut into short lengths. Combine with the mixed herbs and refrigerate until needed.

Put the pork loin into a small frying pan with the fish sauce, sugar and 2 tablespoons water. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 2 minutes. Turn the pork over and simmer for a further 2 minutes. Turn off the heat and allow to cool in the pan. Remove from the cooking liquid and cut into thin slices.

To assemble, dip the rice paper wrappers briefly in water, then transfer to a clean tea towel (dish towel), shiny side down. Smooth over the wrappers with clean wet hands, then put one prawn on the bottom third of the wrapper, so that the colourful side is facing down. Over the top, place a lettuce leaf, a couple of slices of pork and 2 tablespoons of the herbed rice

vermicelli noodles. Pick up the bottom edge of the paper and enclose the filling, then tuck in the sides. At this stage place 2 garlic chives so that they stick out the side and continue rolling. Repeat with the remaining wrappers and filling. Serve with Nuoc cham, if desired.

Note

A vegetarian version of this can be made with thinly sliced red capsicum (bell pepper), blanched and sliced green beans and thinly sliced spring onion (scallion) added to the vermicelli noodles and herbs. Chopped roasted peanuts can be added if desired. Serve with chilli sauce.

Canh Gà Bi Đao
Chicken and winter melon soup

Serves: 6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) chicken wings
1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) winter melon (gourd) or cucumber
6 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon fish sauce

Cut the chicken wings in half. Peel the melon, discard the skin, seeds and membrane and cut into bite-sized pieces.

Put the chicken into a large saucepan with the spring onion, salt and 1.25 litres (42 fl oz/5 cups) water. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 1 hour, or until the liquid has reduced and the broth is well-flavoured. Add the winter melon, bring to the boil for 1 minute only, then add the fish sauce and season with freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serve immediately, with rice if desired.

Note

If using cucumber, make sure they are first peeled, sliced and deseeded before adding to the soup.

Canh Tôm Vò Viên
Prawn drop soup

Serves: 4

1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) fish or chicken stock
1 tablespoon fish sauce
½ quantity Prawn paste
150 g (5½ oz/2 cups) finely shredded Chinese cabbage (wombok)
3 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced

Put the stock into a large saucepan with the fish sauce and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low and continue to simmer. Take ½ teaspoon of the prawn paste at a time and drop it into the simmering stock – when cooked it will turn opaque and rise to the top. Repeat until all the paste is used, then add the cabbage, bring back to the boil, cover and cook for 1 minute, or until the cabbage is tender. Sprinkle the spring onion on top and remove from the heat immediately. Cover and leave to rest for 1 minute, then serve hot.

Canh Đâu Hu
Soup with tofu

Serves: 2

500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) strong chicken stock
2 squares fresh tofu
125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) chopped cooked chicken
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

Put the stock in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Add the tofu and chicken, reduce the heat to low and simmer until heated through. Serve the soup with the coriander sprinkled over the top.

Canh Cu Sen
Pork and lotus root soup

Serves: 4

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) frozen lotus root
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) lean pork ribs, cut into short lengths
3 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
½ teaspoon salt
1–2 tablespoons fish sauce

Peel the lotus root and cut into thin slices. Put it into a large saucepan with the pork and spring onion, salt and 1.5 litres (51 fl oz/6 cups) water. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 1½ hours, or until the pork is well cooked and the liquid has reduced to about 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups). Add the fish sauce to taste and serve hot with white rice.

Pho
Beef soup with salad

You may well think a soup and a salad are an odd combination when served together, but don't miss out on this national dish by being too cautious. Rather like the moh hin gha of Burma, the strong stock is combined with other ingredients to make a meal in a bowl. Pho can be served at the table with the hot stock still simmering at the table, as guests add other components to their bowls to suit their own tastes.

Serves: 6–8

Beef stock
3 kg (6 lb 10 oz) beef rib bones
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) stewing steak
2 onions, sliced
1 tablespoon thinly sliced fresh ginger
1 cinnamon stick
1 teaspoon whole black peppercorns
3 star anise

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) fresh rice noodles or 250 g (9 oz) dried rice noodles
495 g (1 lb 1 oz/5½ cups) fresh bean sprouts, trimmed
6 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
4 firm ripe tomatoes, halved lengthways and thinly sliced
2 white onions, thinly sliced
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) rump steak, thinly sliced
fish sauce
lemon wedges
fresh red or green chillies, deseeded and thinly sliced
chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
1 large handful fresh mint leaves
1 large handful Thai basil leaves

Put the bones and steak into a large saucepan with enough water to cover. Add the onion, ginger, cinnamon stick, peppercorns and star anise. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for at least 6 hours. Skim off any scum that rises to the surface during cooking. Season with salt to taste.

If using fresh rice noodles, slice them into 7 cm (2¾ in) lengths and pour boiling water over them, then drain well. If using dried rice noodles, cook them in a saucepan of boiling water until tender, then drain well.

Arrange the bean sprouts, spring onion, tomato, onion and steak on a serving plate.

To serve, put some of the cooked noodles and some bean sprouts in large individual serving bowls. Put a few slices of beef, tomato and onion in a large ladle, immerse in the boiling stock until the beef begins to lose its redness – it should be pale pink. Pour the contents of the ladle over the noodles and bean sprouts. Guests add fish sauce, a squeeze of lemon juice, chillies and fresh herbs to taste.

Canh Bun Tau
Fish and cellophane noodle soup

Serves: 6–8

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) fish sauce
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
60 g (2 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
1½ tablespoons peanut oil
1 onion, thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 daun salam leaves (glossary)
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon dried shrimp paste
1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
1 tablespoon thinly sliced spring onions (scallions)

Coarsely chop the fish and place in a bowl with the ginger, 1 tablespoon of the fish sauce and half of the salt and pepper. Set aside.

Soak the noodles in hot water for 10 minutes, then drain well.

Heat the peanut oil in a large heavy-based saucepan over low heat. Add the onion, garlic and daun salam leaves and stir-fry until the onion is soft. Add the turmeric and dried shrimp paste and stir-fry for a further 1 minute, using a spoon to crush the paste against the side of the pan. Add the lemon zest, 1.5 litres (51 fl oz/6 cups) water and the noodles and remaining fish sauce. Season with the remaining salt and pepper. Boil for 5 minutes, then add the fish, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 5 minutes, or until the fish is cooked through. Remove from the heat, sprinkle with the spring onion and serve hot.

Mains

Muc Dôn Thit
Squid stuffed with pork

Serves: 6–8

6 dried shiitake mushrooms
10 dried lily buds (golden needles) (glossary)
250 g (9 oz) minced (ground) pork
25 g (1 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
1 garlic clove, crushed
3 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon fish sauce
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) squid
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) peanut oil for frying

Soak the mushrooms and lily buds in separate bowls with hot water for 20–30 minutes, then drain well. Cut off and discard the mushroom stems and thinly slice the caps. Discard any tough portions of the flowers and chop finely.

Soak the cellophane noodles in hot water for 10 minutes, then drain well.

Put the mushroom, lily buds, pork and ½ cup of the noodles in a bowl and toss to combine. Add the garlic, spring onion, salt, pepper and fish sauce to taste, using your hands to thoroughly combine.

Clean each squid, removing the ink sac, discarding the head and reserving the tentacles. Rinse the tubes under cold running water to remove the skin. Drain well. Chop the tentacles finely and mix with the pork mixture.

Stuff the pork mixture into each squid tube, packing it in firmly, and securing the end with a short toothpick to seal.

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Cook the squid for 5 minutes. Prick the squid with a fine skewer, turn and continue to cook for a further 10 minutes, or until cooked through – you may need to cook for a little longer if the squid are large.

To serve, cut each stuffed squid into thin slices and arrange on a bed of lettuce leaves.

Trung Chiên Voi Cua
Crab omelette

Serves: 3–4

4 eggs, lightly beaten
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
125 g (4½ oz) crabmeat
oil for frying
2 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
1 fresh red chilli, deseeded and sliced (optional)
1 teaspoon fish sauce
Nuoc cham to serve

Season the egg with the salt and pepper.

Flake the crabmeat, discarding any bony tissue.

Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a frying pan over low heat. Add the spring onion and chilli and stir-fry for 1 minute, then add the crabmeat and continue to stir-fry for a further 1–2 minutes. Add the fish sauce and stir through, then remove to a small plate and allow to cool.

Heat 1 teaspoon of the oil in the frying pan, pour in the egg and cook, drawing the egg mixture in from the side of the pan, until set on the bottom and creamy on top. Spoon the crab mixture into the centre of the omelette and fold the omelette in half, then cook until heated through. Serve with the nuoc cham.

Ca Hâp
Steamed fish

Serves: 6

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) whole fish or 750 g (1 lb 11 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
90 g (3 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
8 dried shiitake mushrooms
1 carrot, cut into thin matchsticks
2 tablespoon finely grated fresh ginger
1 large garlic clove, crushed
125 g (4½ oz/1½ cups) thinly sliced cooked pork
2 tablespoons light soy sauce
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons fish sauce
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) coconut milk
2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
2 tablespoons thinly sliced spring onion (scallion)

Wipe the fish with damp paper towel. If using whole fish, rub salt over the body, then rinse well and dry with paper towel. Trim the fins and tail and make diagonal slashes in the flesh to allow for the seasonings to penetrate. Place in a large heatproof dish.

Soak the noodles in hot water for 20 minutes, then drain well and cut into short lengths.

Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes, then drain well, cut off and discard the stems and thinly slice the caps.

Combine the noodles, mushroom, carrot, ginger, garlic, pork, soy sauce, salt, pepper and fish sauce in a bowl. Spread this over the fish, then steam the fish for 30 minutes, or until the fish is cooked through. If using fish

fillets, these should only take 15–20 minutes. Pour the coconut milk over the top and garnish with the coriander and spring onion. Serve with white rice.

Ca Vo Viên Xao Cai Be Trang
Fish cakes with Chinese cabbage

Serves: 4

1 tablespoon oil
1 garlic clove, crushed
½ teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
½ head Chinese cabbage (wombok), cut into 2.5 cm (1 in) slices
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
½ teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons oyster sauce
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) stock or water
3 Chinese-style fish cakes, thinly sliced (glossary)
½ teaspoon cornflour (cornstarch)

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over low heat. Add the garlic and ginger and cook for a few seconds, then add the cabbage and stir-fry for 1 minute. Add the soy sauce, salt and oyster sauce and stir well to combine. Add the stock and bring to the boil, then add the sliced fish cake and stir until heated through.

In a small bowl, combine the cornflour with just enough water to make a smooth paste.

Push the ingredients to the side of the wok, add the cornflour mixture to the centre of the wok and stir constantly until it boils and thickens. Toss all the ingredients together and serve at once with white rice.

Gà Hâp Cà
Steamed chicken with tomatoes

Serves: 4

750 g (1 lb 11 oz) boneless skinless chicken thighs and breasts
3 ripe tomatoes, cut into thin wedges
3 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
1 tablespoon finely grated fresh ginger
2 tablespoons fish sauce
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon sugar
freshly ground black pepper to taste
2 teaspoons sesame oil
Nuoc cham to serve

Remove the skin and bones from the chicken and cut the flesh into bite-sized pieces.

Put the chicken into a heatproof bowl or other deep dish with all the remaining ingredients and mix thoroughly.

Fill a large saucepan or deep frying pan with water and bring to the boil. Place the bowl in the pan – the water should come about one-third of the way up the bowl. Cover and steam for about 25–35 minutes, or until the chicken is cooked through. Check periodically to ensure that the water has not boiled away, and add more boiling water if it is getting low. Serve with white rice and nuoc cham.

Nâm Đông Cô Tiêm Gà
Steamed chicken with mushrooms

Serves: 4

6 dried shiitake mushrooms
1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) whole chicken
1 tablespoon finely shredded fresh ginger
3 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
freshly ground black pepper to taste
2 teaspoons fish sauce
1 small garlic clove, crushed
¼ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon sesame oil

Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes. Drain well. Cut off and discard the mushroom stems and thinly slice the caps.

Divide the chicken into 2 parts. (Depending on what you want to do with the remaining flesh, cut the bird into halves lengthways, or reserve the breast and wings for another dish.) Remove the skin and bones from the chicken and cut the flesh into bite-sized pieces.

Put the chicken into a heatproof bowl or other deep dish with the mushroom and remaining ingredients. Mix well.

Fill a large saucepan or deep frying pan with water and bring to the boil. Place the bowl in the pan – the water should come about one-third of the way up the bowl. Cover and steam for about 25–30 minutes, or until the chicken is cooked through. Check periodically to ensure that the water has not boiled away, and add more boiling water if it is getting low. Serve with rice, noodles or cellophane (bean thread) noodles.

Gà Xào Xa Ót
Chicken with lemongrass

Serves: 4–6

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) whole chicken
3–4 stems lemongrass, white part only, thinly sliced
3 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, plus extra to taste
2 tablespoons oil
1–2 fresh red chillies, deseeded and chopped
80 g (2¾ oz/½ cup) roasted peanuts, finely chopped
2 teaspoons sugar
2 tablespoons fish sauce

Joint the chicken (see Jointing a chicken) and cut into serving pieces.

Gently bruise the lemongrass using a mortar and pestle.

Place the lemongrass in a bowl with the spring onion, salt, pepper and chicken and toss well to combine. Set aside for 30 minutes.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the chicken mixture and stir-fry for 3 minutes. Add the chilli and stir-fry for a further 10 minutes, or until the chicken is cooked through. Add the peanuts, season with the sugar and extra pepper and stir well. Add the fish sauce and toss to distribute evenly, then serve with rice or noodles.

Gà Xào Bún Tàu
Chicken with cellophane noodles

Serves: 4–6

750 g (1 lb 11 oz) boneless skinless chicken thighs and breasts
125 g (4½ oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
1 tablespoon oil
2 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
2 tablespoons fish sauce
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 firm ripe tomatoes
2 white onions
vinegar to taste
sugar to taste

Remove the skin from the chicken and cut the meat into bite-sized pieces.

Soak the noodles in hot water for 20 minutes, then drain well and cut the noodles into bite-sized lengths.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan. Add the spring onion and chicken and stir-fry for 2–3 minutes. Add the fish sauce, soy sauce, pepper and 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) water, bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 3 minutes. Add the noodles, bring back to the boil, stirring constantly, and boil for a further 3 minutes. Remove from the heat and serve hot, accompanied by a salad of sliced tomato and sliced white onions, dressed with a dash of white vinegar, a sprinkling of sugar, and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

Thit Heo Kho Tiêu
Dry-cooked pork

Serves: 6–8

750 g (1 lb 11 oz) lean pork chops (cutlets)
2 tablespoons fish sauce
1 tablespoon sugar
3 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Remove the skin and bones from the pork chops, and cut the meat into thin strips. Put the meat into a small, deep saucepan – avoid using a large pan as the liquid will evaporate too quickly.

Add all the remaining ingredients and 2 tablespoons water and bring to the boil. Cook for 2 minutes over high heat, then reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes, or until the liquid is completely absorbed and the pork is cooked through. Stir towards end of cooking so that the meat does not burn. Serve with rice and salad.

Cha Đùm
Pork loaf

Serves: 4–6

8–10 dried shiitake mushrooms
750 g (1 lb 11 oz) minced (ground) pork
6 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
4 eggs, lightly beaten
1 tablespoon fish sauce
½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
Nuoc cham to serve

Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes. Drain well, then cut off and discard the mushroom stems and thinly slice the caps. Place in a bowl with the remaining ingredients and mix well to combine.

Grease a loaf (bar) tin and pack the mixture firmly into it, cover with a double layer of baking paper or foil and steam over high heat for 1 hour or longer, or until well cooked. Allow to cool slightly in the tin until firm, then turn out, slice and serve with a lettuce salad and nuoc cham.

Thit Heo Kho Khô
Pork cooked with sugar

Serves: 6–8

1–1.25 kg (2 lb 3 oz–2 lb 12 oz) pork belly or loin
2 tablespoons oil
3 spring onions (scallions), finely chopped
2 teaspoons sugar
½ teaspoon salt
a pinch of freshly ground black pepper or to taste
2 tablespoons fish sauce

Cut the pork into large cubes – do not discard all the fat as this adds flavour.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over low heat. Add the spring onion and cook until golden. Add the pork and stir-fry until the pork starts to change colour, then add the sugar, salt and pepper, and continue stirring until the meat is brown all over.

Add 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) water to the pan and simmer for 1 hour. Add the fish sauce and continue to simmer until the pork is almost dry, taking care to stir frequently as the liquid reduces or the pork may burn. Serve with white rice.

Đùi Heo Kho Nôi Đât
Pot-roasted pork

This is not eaten as a one-sitting meal, but prepared and then used in a number of dishes requiring cooked pork, just as barbecued pork fillet is used in Chinese cooking.

1.5–2 kg (3 lb 5 oz–4 lb 6 oz) leg of pork
5 garlic cloves
2 teaspoons salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 tablespoon oil

Slice 4 of the garlic cloves. Make small deep incisions all over the pork with the tip of a small knife and insert slices of garlic in each cut.

Crush the remaining garlic with the salt, then combine with the pepper and fish sauce and rub all over the pork.

Heat the oil in a large, deep casserole or heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. Cook the pork briefly on all sides until brown all over. Add 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) water, bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook for 1½ hours, or until the pork is cooked through. Turn the pork 3 or 4 times during cooking so that it cooks evenly.

Allow to cool, then cut into slices and serve with salad, or use in other dishes requiring pork.

Nem Nuóng
Skewered pork, barbecued

The pork for this recipe is pounded, not minced (ground). If the thought exhausts you, take the easy way out, but the end result will not be the same.

Serves: 6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) pork fillet
2 garlic cloves
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon sugar
3 teaspoons rice wine or dry sherry
2 tablespoons melted pork fat or lard
1 tablespoon toasted ground rice (glossary)
3 teaspoons fish sauce
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) fresh rice noodles or 125 g (4½ oz) dried rice noodles
1 head lettuce, rinsed and separated into leaves
sprigs of fresh coriander (cilantro) or mint to serve
Nuoc lèo sauce

Soak bamboo skewers in water to prevent them from burning during cooking.

Cut the pork fillet into very thin slices, then cut into small dice. Crush the garlic finely with the salt and sugar, then mix with the wine. Pour over the pork, mix well and set aside for at least 30 minutes to marinate.

Using a mortar and pestle, pound the meat, working with small portions at a time, until it has a paste-like consistency. As each lot is done, remove it to a large bowl. Add the melted pork fat, ground rice and fish sauce and use your hands to knead together and combine. Form small sausage shapes and mould them onto bamboo skewers, squeezing them on very firmly. Barbecue over glowing coals or under a preheated grill (broiler), at a good distance from the heat source, turning often until cooked through.

Cook the noodles in hot water for 10 minutes until tender, then drain well. Serve the skewers with the noodles, lettuce leaves, coriander and nuoc lèo sauce and let each person assemble their own snack. A leaf of lettuce is topped with a few rice noodles, some pork, a sprig of fresh coriander, a spoonful of sauce, then rolled up to form a neat roll. This takes some practice. If preferred, the sauce may be served as a dipping sauce.

Bò Xào Mâng
Beef with bamboo shoots

Serves: 3–4
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) peanut oil
375 g (13 oz) rump or fillet steak, thinly sliced into 5 cm (2 in) strips
1 large tin bamboo shoots, drained and sliced
6 spring onions (scallions), sliced
1 tablespoon fish sauce
½ teaspoon salt
1 garlic clove, crushed
4 tablespoons toasted, crushed sesame seeds

Heat 2 tablespoons of the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the beef and stir-fry for 1 minute. Remove from the wok while the meat is still pink.

Heat the remaining oil in the same wok. Add the bamboo shoots and spring onion and stir-fry for 2 minutes. Add the fish sauce and salt and continue to stir-fry for a further 5 minutes. Add the garlic and stir-fry for 1 minute, then return the beef to the wok and stir-fry for 1 minute. Add the sesame seeds, toss to combine, and serve hot with rice.

Bò Xào Dâu Mè
Beef with sesame sauce

Serves: 3–4

½ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon bicarbonate of soda (baking soda)
1 tablespoon soy sauce
250 g (9 oz) round steak, thinly sliced
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) peanut oil
1 garlic clove, crushed
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) beef stock
3 teaspoons cornflour (cornstarch)
2 teaspoons sesame paste (glossary)
1–2 teaspoons Chinese chilli sauce

In a bowl, mix together the salt, bicarbonate of soda, soy sauce and 2 tablespoons hot water. Add the beef and turn to coat until all the liquid has been absorbed, then set aside to marinate for 2 hours, or refrigerate overnight. (If rump or other tender steak is used, this step may be omitted.)

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over high heat. Add the garlic and beef and stir-fry for about 2 minutes, or until the meat has changed colour. Add the stock and bring to the boil.

In a small bowl, combine the cornflour and 2 tablespoons cold water to make a smooth paste. Add to the wok, stirring until the sauce boils and thickens. Turn off the heat, stir in the sesame paste and chilli sauce and serve immediately with white rice.

Note

You can add vegetables to this dish if you like – try adding some sliced bamboo shoots or Chinese cabbage (wombok) with bean sprouts.

Accompaniments

Trúng Hâp
Steamed egg with mushrooms

Serves: 3–4

4 dried shiitake mushrooms
25 g (1 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
125 g (4½ oz) crabmeat or prawn (shrimp) meat
5 eggs
2 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
½ teaspoon salt
⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) finely chopped cooked pork
Nuoc cham to serve

Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes. Drain well. Cut off and discard the mushroom stems and thinly slice the caps.

Soak the noodles in hot water for 20 minutes, then drain well. Measure ½ cup of the noodles and set aside. Flake the crabmeat and discard any bony bits.

Beat the eggs until the yolks and whites are well mixed but not frothy. Stir in the spring onion, coriander, salt and pepper and then the mushroom, noodles, crabmeat and pork. Pour the mixture into a baking dish.

Fill a large saucepan or deep frying pan with water and bring to the boil. Place the baking dish in the pan – the water should come about one-third of the way up the bowl. Cover and steam for about 25–35 minutes, or until the egg is cooked through. Check periodically to ensure that the water has not boiled away, and add more boiling water if it is getting low. Serve with rice and nuoc cham.

Com Chay
Stir-fried mixed vegetables

Serves: 4

6 dried shiitake mushrooms
1 tablespoon dark soy sauce
1 teaspoon sesame oil
2 teaspoons sugar
1 tablespoon oil
1 garlic clove, crushed
½ teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
3 celery stalks, thinly sliced
3 spring onions (scallions), sliced
½ head cabbage or Chinese cabbage (wombok), chopped
3–4 mustard cabbage (gai choy) leaves, chopped
1 small head lettuce, chopped
1½ tablespoons light soy sauce
1 teaspoon cornflour (cornstarch)

Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes. Drain well, then cut off and discard the mushroom stems and thinly slice the caps. Place in a small saucepan with 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) water, the dark soy sauce, sesame oil and sugar and simmer until almost all the liquid has been absorbed.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the garlic and ginger and heat for a few seconds only. Add the celery and spring onion and stir-fry over high heat for 2 minutes, then add the cabbages and lettuce and stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the light soy sauce and mushroom mixture with 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) water and stir to combine.

In a small bowl, combine the cornflour with 1 tablespoon water and stir to make a smooth paste. Add to the wok and stir until the sauce boils and thickens. Serve at once with rice.

Nuoc Châm
Garlic, chilli and fish sauce

No Vietnamese meal is considered complete without this sauce, which is used as freely as salt and pepper in the West. It is also known as nuoc mam sauce.

2 fresh red chillies
2 garlic cloves, peeled
1 tablespoon sugar
½ lemon or 1 lime
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) fish sauce

If you want a milder sauce, remove the seeds from the chillies. Otherwise, simply cut the chillies into pieces, and pound using a mortar and pestle. Add the garlic and sugar and continue to pound to a pulp. Peel the lemon, removing all the white pith, then cut into thin slices, discarding any seeds. Add a small piece of lemon at a time to the chilli and pound to a pulp. Stir in the vinegar, fish sauce and 2 tablespoons water. Serve the sauce in a small bowl and use sparingly.

Nuoc Lèo
Glutinous rice and soy bean sauce

Makes: 2 cups

100 g (3½ oz/½ cup) glutinous rice
4–5 garlic cloves
2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon oil
250 g (9 oz) minced (ground) pork
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) Chinese ground bean sauce
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) chicken or pork stock
1 tablespoon fish sauce
2 teaspoons Chinese chilli sauce
160 g (5½ oz/1 cup) roasted peanuts, crushed

Put the rice and 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) water into a large heavy-based saucepan and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes, then uncover and continue simmering, stirring occasionally, until all the water has been absorbed.

Crush the garlic with 1 teaspoon of the sugar. Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over low heat. Add the garlic and cook until it starts to change colour. Add the pork and stir-fry over medium heat until it changes colour, then add the pepper and bean sauce and stir well to combine. Add the stock, remaining sugar and fish sauce, stir well and simmer for a further 1–2 minutes. Add the cooked rice and continue simmering for 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from the heat, then stir in the chilli sauce and ground peanuts. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Desserts

Chuôi Nuong
Banana cake with cashews

Makes: 2 x 20 cm round cakes

3 eggs
220 g (8 oz/1 cup) sugar
190 ml (6½ oz/¾ cup) pouring (single/light) cream or coconut cream
225 g (8 oz/1½ cups) plain (all-purpose) flour
2 kg (4 lb 6 oz) very ripe bananas
155 g (5½ oz/1 cup) cashew nuts, coarsely chopped
60 g (2 oz/1 cup) grated fresh coconut

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F). Lightly grease two 20 cm (8 in) round cake tins and dust lightly with flour, shaking out any excess.

Beat the eggs and sugar together in the bowl of an electric mixer on low speed until thick and pale. Add the cream and beat for a few seconds until just combined. Sift in the flour and use a wooden spoon to fold together.

Peel the bananas and smash with the flat side of a chopper, but do not mash. Add to the batter with the nuts and coconut and stir only until just combined.

Pour into the prepared tins and bake in the oven for 1 hour, or until the top is golden brown – the cake will be quite solid, much like a pudding. Serve warm or cold.

Bánh Flan
Vietnamese crème caramel

A successful fusion of cuisines and techniques, this easy steamed crème caramel uses less fat (no cream, just whole milk) and whole eggs, giving it a smoother, silkier texture that is firmer than the traditional French dessert. The ingenious method of steaming came about since ovens are rare in Vietnamese kitchens.

Makes: 6

Caramel
110 g (4 oz/½ cup) sugar

Custard
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) milk
4 eggs
110 g (4 oz/½ cup) sugar
1 teaspoon natural vanilla extract

To make the caramel, put the sugar and 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) water into a saucepan over medium heat and sit over the heat, without stirring, until golden. Divide this mixture evenly between six 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) capacity ramekins or similar moulds, swirling to coat the base. (Heating the caramel briefly in a microwave will make it fluid again if it has set prematurely.)

Put the milk into a separate saucepan and bring just to simmering point. In a bowl, whisk together the eggs and sugar until just combined, then gradually add the hot milk, stirring constantly. Stir in the vanilla to combine, then remove from the heat and strain the milk mixture into each mould over the caramel until filled almost to the top.

Fill a large saucepan or deep frying pan with water and bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low. Place the ramekins on a rack over the

simmering water, cover, and cook for 20 minutes, or until firm. If the heat is too high, the custard will bubble and lose its silky smoothness.

Remove from the heat, chill for a few hours, then turn out and serve. The caramel melts as the dessert chills, so for more caramel syrup, make them a day ahead.

Cambodia & Laos

Cambodia (Khmer)

Rice is the staff of life, as in all of Asia, and you won't have to drive far out of Cambodia's cities to see how much land is dedicated to growing it. While rice is shooting, the paddy fields are a patchwork of vibrant green. Later in the season you can drive through the villages and see the harvested rice, golden grains drying in the sun on large woven mats. Many rural families grow enough rice for their own needs and also raise their own chickens.

However, not all farming takes place on dry land, and floating villages on the Mekong and its tributaries are a unique part of Cambodian culture. Every aspect of life is catered to, from church to school to floating 'farmyards' of pigs and chickens. Fishermen rhythmically beat their nets with sticks to release the tiny, flailing silver fish caught up in them – presumably for making fish sauce. No trip to Cambodia would be complete without a glimpse of life on the river.

The principal diet of the people is rice and fish. Fish and shellfish are plentiful, from both the Mekong River and the sea. Vegetables grow easily in the tropical heat of this often lush, green land and make up a substantial part of the local diet. Many village families will cultivate a garden plot to grow bananas and other fruit and vegetables for their own needs, but daily visits to the markets are still necessary as refrigeration is still virtually unknown in rural communities.

Buffalo meat, pork, chicken, duck, pigeons and tiny paddy birds (even smaller than sparrows), which come to the rice fields and are captured in nets, are eaten with enjoyment, but in much smaller quantities than in the West. Meat and poultry are never the main dish, but always the accompaniment. Rice is served boiled with fish or a little poultry or buffalo meat for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Sometimes a bowl of noodle soup may take its place at breakfast, but for the two main meals of the day it is rice (cooked without salt) that is the central dish. It is accompanied by fried fish, kari, vegetables and a soup. All the dishes are served at once, and diners make their own choice. Mutton (or lamb) is not eaten at all.

'Cambodian food is very much like Thai or Lao food with a touch of Chinese influence,' I was told by John Lee Kha and Miss Lyna, people from Cambodia who I interviewed when I was researching this book. There is no doubt that there are flavours common to all three cuisines.

As we talked over lunch, I noticed that John's cup was filled with what seemed to be water, yet it steamed like hot tea. When I asked him what was generally drunk with meals in Cambodia, he told me that tea or coffee are seldom served and, when tea is served, Chinese tea is preferred but it is usual for a cup of warm water (gesturing towards his cup) to be sipped along with the meal. In very hot weather the evening meal might consist only of plain boiled rice to give the digestion a rest.

Cambodian cooking is full of flavour, but many of the herbs used are not widely available outside Southeast Asia, so I have chosen dishes using the better-known flavourings. As in most other Asian countries, cooking in Cambodia is not an exact science, but everything is cooked 'to taste' and the cook is expected to use originality and initiative to improve the flavour of a dish.

In common with the people of Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Burma, Cambodians consider fish sauce, *tirk trey*, next to rice in importance. It would be unthinkable for them to have to do without it, or *prahok*, their pungent fermented fish paste.

A very popular Cambodian dish is *trei aing*, fish grilled over charcoal and served with a dish of raw vegetables such as cucumber slices and fresh bean

sprouts, salad greens and fresh herbs (mint, dill, coriander/cilantro). But this is incomplete until the pungent sauce is served. The sauce is based on fish sauce with garlic, fresh chillies, lemon juice, sugar and vinegar, up to which point it is strikingly similar to Vietnam's *nuoc cham*. But the Cambodian version also includes roasted ground peanuts, an ingredient it shares with Laotian and Thai sauces. Small pieces of the grilled fish are wrapped in a salad leaf with cucumber, bean sprouts and a sprig or two of fresh herbs and the whole parcel is dipped in the sauce before being eaten with rice.

Although there is not the same emphasis on sweet desserts as in the West, you may eat your fill of luscious tropical bounty, for most fruits you can imagine are available in their season. With tropical fruits on offer, such as rambutan, longan, mangosteen, dragon fruit, milkfruit, sapodilla, pineapple, small mandarins, roseapple, pomegranate, young coconut, tiny bananas, mangoes and the much maligned durian, who needs to cook dessert?

Laos

The most distinctive feature of Laotian cuisine is the prominence given to glutinous rice. In other Asian countries, glutinous (or sticky) rice, sometimes called 'sweet rice', is used exclusively for sweets or little snacks, but Laotians prefer this rice for all kinds of dishes and serve it at mealtimes. For breakfast, glutinous rice is soaked for 8–10 hours, steamed until soft and eaten with mango, coconut or *padek* (a fish product made at home in which chunks of fish are preserved in brine). The liquid in which the fish is steeped is also used and is known as *nam padek*. The rice is also sometimes steamed and eaten with black beans or yams.

In Cambodian and Laotian cities, restaurants serving local food have only emerged in recent times. In the past, when people ate out, they would traditionally eat excellent Chinese or French food. Interestingly, the French influence on the food of these countries has not mingled with the local dishes; it has remained separate and become very popular. However, the interest of tourists who want to taste the local cuisine as well as the growing popularity of these countries as tourist destinations has resulted in the emergence of restaurants serving national dishes.

When I wrote this cookbook, the only opportunity for eating local cuisine was to be invited into a Lao home. Lao dishes take a long time to prepare and all the ingredients have to be fresh. Meals are not planned in advance and the menu depends on whatever is available when mealtime comes. They would never consider using frozen food. Lao people enjoy eating fresh meat, fresh vegetables and fresh fruit. Not many people have refrigerators in which to store their food, and even if they had they would not choose to store it for long.

Every typical Lao house has a small garden in front or at the back to grow vegetables and the myriad herbs that are used in Laotian food – different types of mint, lemongrass, galangal, Lao eggplant (aubergine), chillies of various kinds and banana trees are the most common. The banana tree is put to many uses. The fruit is eaten both fresh and ripe, or cooked as a vegetable when it is starchy and unripe. The large, heavy flower is also used as a vegetable. The leaves are invaluable for wrapping food before steaming or grilling over coals and even the inside of the tree trunk is used. Some ingredients – onions, garlic, chilli, tamarind, among others are dried and stored for use when they are out of season.

The daily income is far from sufficient for most families, so some of the men hunt for food and are rewarded with deer or other game. Others go fishing, for there are plenty of fish in the many tributaries of the Mekong River. Chickens, ducks, pigs and turkeys are commonly reared for food.

The meals eaten in Laos are simple. For breakfast, glutinous rice is served with black or white coffee. Sometimes tasty morsels of dried meat, fried chicken, beef, fish or pork may be served with the rice and accompanied by chilli paste.

Lunch is rice again, accompanied by soup, a fish, meat or chicken dish, some fresh or cooked vegetables and, of course, the hot sauce. The evening meal is similar, but far from repetitive or dull. An imaginative cook, in Laos as elsewhere, can vary the same main ingredients with a hundred different combinations of flavours. On Sundays, for a special lunch, the traditional dish called *lap* or *koy* is prepared. After Sunday breakfast one visits the local market for a leg of fresh venison and some of the deer’s liver as well

as one or two vegetables. Back home, the preparation begins. All the best meat is cut into thin slices or minced. The scraps and the bone are used to make strong, tasty stocks and broths.

Meanwhile, the liver is cut into thin slices like the meat; dried red chillies are fried and then ground; glutinous rice is roasted until dark brown, then pounded finely; galangal is scraped and cut into shreds; spring onions (scallions) are sliced; three kinds of mint are chopped; fish paste is cooked and mixed to a sauce which is served with the *lap*, and some wild vegetables and bitter greens are picked from the garden or from a neighbouring garden. Like so many Asian cultures, Laotians are generous and very willing to share, and when the food is cooked a dish of it is often sent to friends and neighbours.

Just before the meal is served, fish sauce, lime juice and spring onion are added to the stock to 'sharpen the taste'. The raw meat and liver are mixed with lime juice, ground chilli, ground rice, galangal and herbs. Steamed glutinous rice, which is kept warm in woven bamboo baskets, is served alongside. *Lap* also means 'luck', so this dish is traditionally served at weddings, housewarming ceremonies and other important occasions. Instead of venison one may substitute fresh fish, chicken or half-cooked pork. Rice wine is usually served.

Serving and eating a Cambodian and Laotian meal

Though dining tables are sometimes used, most people prefer to sit on a mat on the floor around a large rattan tray. Each tray is big enough to accommodate six people and stands about 40–50 cm (16–20 in) high. All the dishes are placed on the tray and the rice baskets are put between the diners. Forks and spoons might be used, but fingers are used to eat sticky rice. A tray of fresh bananas, papayas or other fruit is placed on one side so that people can help themselves after the meal.

Utensils

Of prime importance in a Cambodian or Laotian kitchen, as in most of Southeast Asia, is a mortar and pestle. So is a sharp chopper and stout chopping board. Cooking is done in a wok, and steaming takes place in bamboo baskets or over earthenware pots of water.

For the recipes that follow, a wok plus the equipment in a Western kitchen will suffice.

Your Cambodian and Laotian shelf

This is a list of spices, sauces, sambals and other flavourings which are often used in Camdodian and Laotian cooking and good to have on hand to make the recipes in this chapter.

bamboo shoots, tinned
black pepper, ground
cellophane (bean thread) noodles
chilli powder
chillies, dried red and fresh
coconut milk and cream
coriander, ground
cornflour (cornstarch)
cumin, ground
dried shrimp
fennel, ground
fermented fish paste (prahok)
fish sauce
galangal, fresh or brined
green peppercorns, in brine
laos (dried galangal) powder
palm sugar (jaggery)
peanut oil
peanuts, raw or roasted (unsalted)
rice wine or dry sherry
sesame oil
sesame seeds

shiitake mushrooms, dried
soy sauce, light and dark
turmeric, ground
water chestnuts, tinned
wood ear fungus, dried

Noodles and Rice

Bay Poun
Moulded rice

Serves: 4

500 g (1 lb 2 oz/2½ cups) long-grain rice
1 teaspoon salt
125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) chopped pork fat
125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) chopped lean pork
125 g (4½ oz/½ cup) chopped chicken meat
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
3 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
fish sauce to taste, plus extra to serve
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Wash the rice well and drain in a colander for 30 minutes.

Put the rice, salt and 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) water into a large saucepan. Bring to the boil, cover, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 20 minutes, by which time all of the water should be absorbed. Remove the lid and allow the steam to escape while preparing the meats.

Put the pork fat into a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat and stir-fry until it is crisp and golden and the fat is melted. Add the lean pork and chicken meat, with the garlic and spring onion and stir-fry for 10 minutes, or until the meats are well cooked. Add the rice, which has been forked through, and toss well to combine, then add the fish sauce and pepper to taste. Remove from the heat, press firmly into a lightly greased 1.5 litre (51 fl oz/6 cup) capacity mould, cover with foil and keep warm. Turn out and serve with extra fish sauce if desired.

Note

This recipe is perfect for using up left-over white rice, in which case, 740 g (1 lb 10 oz/4 cups) cooked rice is needed.

Phu Khoua Kai Nor May
Long rice with chicken and bamboo shoots

Serves: 6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) chicken pieces
1 garlic clove, crushed
250 g (9 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
1 tablespoon peanut oil
2 tinned bamboo shoots, thinly sliced lengthways
1 onion, cut into wedges
1 tablespoon fish sauce
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) chicken stock or water

Remove any bones from the chicken and cut the meat and any skin into small pieces. Place in a bowl with the garlic and mix to combine.

Soak the noodles in hot water for 15 minutes, then drop into lightly salted boiling water and cook for 5–8 minutes, or until tender. Drain well and cut into short lengths.

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over high heat. Add the chicken and stir-fry until the flesh turns white. Push to one side of the wok, add the bamboo shoots and onion, separated into layers, and stir-fry for 1 minute, then toss with the chicken to combine. Add the fish sauce, pepper and stock, and stir-fry for 2 minutes longer, tossing to mix with the sauce. Add the noodles and stir to combine. Serve hot with rice.

Kang Hed Say Hom Pom
Mushroom soup with coriander

Serves: 8

20 g (¾ oz) butter or ghee
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1 small white onion, finely chopped
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) fresh button or field mushrooms, finely chopped
1 teaspoon ground coriander
½ teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
3 chicken stock (bouillon) cubes (optional)
875 ml (29½ fl oz/3½ cups) milk or coconut milk
3 teaspoons cornflour (cornstarch)
2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves to garnish

Heat the butter and oil in a large saucepan over low heat. Add the onion and cook until softened. Add the mushrooms, ground coriander and cumin and continue to stir-fry for a few minutes. Add the salt and pepper, then cover, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add 625 ml (21 fl oz/2½ cups) hot water and the stock cubes, if using, and bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the milk and bring back to the boil once more, stirring occasionally. Remove from the heat.

In a bowl, combine the cornflour and 1 tablespoon cold water to make a smooth paste. Add to the soup and stir to combine. Return to the heat and bring to the boil, stirring constantly until the soup thickens. Serve immediately, garnished with coriander.

Note

If not using stock cubes, adjust the seasoning by adding salt to taste before serving.

Kang Kung
Melon and dried shrimp soup

Serves: 6

25 g (1 oz/½ cup) dried shrimp
6 dried shiitake mushrooms
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) winter melon (gourd) or cucumbers
2 litres (68 fl oz/8 cups) chicken stock
1–2 tablespoons fish sauce, or to taste
6 thin slices fresh ginger
2 tablespoons Chinese rice wine or dry sherry

Put the dried shrimp and 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) water into a bowl and leave to soak overnight. Drain.

Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes. Drain well, cut off and discard the stems and thinly slice the caps.

Peel the melon and scoop out the seeds and membrane. If using cucumber, peel and remove the seeds. Cut the flesh into bite-sized pieces.

Put the stock, fish sauce, ginger, mushroom and dried shrimp into a saucepan, bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for at least 30 minutes. Discard the ginger slices. Add the melon or cucumber and simmer for a further 5 minutes. Serve hot.

Kuay Namuan
Bananas cooked in coconut milk

Serves: 6

6–8 large ripe bananas
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) thick coconut milk
2 tablespoons sugar

Peel and cut each banana into 3 or 4 even-sized pieces.

Put the coconut milk and sugar in a saucepan over low heat. Bring to a simmer and stir until thick and creamy. Add the bananas and continue to simmer for a further 5 minutes, or until the bananas are soft but not mushy. Serve warm as a dessert.

Kang Som Pa
Laotian fish soup

Serves: 4–6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) skinless, boneless freshwater fish fillets
1 stem lemongrass, white part only, bruised, or 2 strips lemon zest
½ teaspoon salt, plus extra to taste
2 tablespoons fish sauce, plus extra to taste
2 tomatoes, quartered
4 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
lemon juice to taste

Wipe the fish with damp paper towel. Cut the fish into serving portions (see preparing whole fish).

Put 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) water into a saucepan with the lemongrass and salt and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the fish and fish sauce and bring back to the boil. Add the tomato, reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat, discard the lemongrass and stir in the spring onion, coriander and lemon juice. Add more fish sauce or salt to taste if needed. Serve hot.

Noeung Svay
Green mango salad

It is hard to convey how green a mango needs to be for this salad, but I have never come across one that was too green – provided it is fully grown. On the other hand, I have bought mangoes that appeared green and felt firm (even in Phnom Penh markets) but which, on cutting, revealed flesh that was already sweet, orange and upon grating turned soft and mushy. Choose a fruit that you think is too hard and all will be well. In Cambodia, a special wavy-edged peeler you can find in the markets does an excellent job of grating green mango. If these are not available, grate on the coarse side of your cheese grater.

Serves: 4–6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) lean boneless skinless chicken thighs or pork loin
1 garlic clove, crushed with ½ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons grated palm sugar (jaggery)
2 tablespoons fish sauce
2 red Asian shallots, thinly sliced
juice of 1 lime, plus extra to taste
25 g (1 oz/½ cup) dried shrimp (optional)
1 green mango, peeled and coarsely grated
1 carrot, finely grated
50 g (1¾ oz/1 cup) whole fresh basil leaves
200 g (7 oz/1¼ cups) roasted peanuts, coarsely chopped

Grill (broil) or barbecue the chicken or pork loin for 5 minutes on each side, or until just cooked through. Cover with foil and allow to rest. When cold, slice thinly.

In a large bowl, combine the garlic, palm sugar, fish sauce, shallots, lime juice and the dried shrimp. Add the chicken and toss gently to coat. Add the grated mango and carrot and toss well, adjusting the taste with extra lime

juice if the mango is not tart enough. Garnish with the basil and roasted peanuts to serve.

Khao Poun
Long rice soup

Serves: 4–6

100 g (3½ oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
125 g (4½ oz) minced (ground) pork
50 g (1¾ oz/⅓ cup) finely chopped smoked ham
1 tablespoon chopped water chestnuts
½ teaspoon cornflour (cornstarch)
2 teaspoons light soy sauce
1.25 litres (42 fl oz/5 cups) boiling water or hot chicken stock
½ teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon finely chopped spring onion (scallion)

Soak the noodles in cold water for 30 minutes. Drain and cut into 15 cm (6 in) lengths.

In a bowl, mix together the pork, ham, water chestnuts, cornflour and soy sauce until well combined. Take portions of the mixture at a time and shape into small balls.

Put the noodles in a saucepan with the boiling water and salt and simmer for 20 minutes. Add the balls to the soup, bring back to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes without stirring. Add the spring onion and serve.

Samlor Chrouk
Pork soup

Serves: 4

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) pork chops, bones reserved for stock and meat finely chopped
1 teaspoon salt
1 star anise
whole black peppercorns
1 leek, white part only, or 1 onion
1 garlic clove
1 tablespoon oil
5 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 teaspoons sugar
1 tablespoon finely shredded young ginger
2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

To make the stock, put the pork bones into a large saucepan with enough water to cover. Add the salt, star anise, peppercorns, leek and garlic clove and bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for at least 30 minutes. Strain and reserve 1.25 litres (42 fl oz/5 cups) stock.

Heat the oil in a large heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. Add the finely chopped garlic and cook until soft. Add the pork and stir-fry for 1 minute, then add the stock, fish sauce, lemon juice, sugar and ginger. Cover and simmer for 30 minutes, or until the pork is cooked. Sprinkle with coriander. Serve hot.

Mains

Kdarm Chha Mrech Kchay
Kep crab with fresh Kampot peppercorns

It's hard to imagine a more decadent way to spend a lazy January afternoon in Kep than sitting in a restaurant perched over the bay on stilts, the gentle lapping of waves below providing the soundtrack for a memorable leisurely lunch. Our table was against the railing that separates the restaurant from the fishermen at work; some on boats mending nets, others wading into the shallows to empty and re-set crab pots. All this, while sipping on young coconut juice and cajoling every last morsel of succulent flesh from freshly caught and cooked blue swimmers laced with fresh, bitey, green Kampot peppercorns. Now that's what I call finger-licking good.

serves: 6

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) raw or cooked blue swimmer crabs (see Note)
6 drupes of fresh green peppercorns (see note) or 2 tablespoons green peppercorns in brine, drained
2 tablespoons peanut or vegetable oil
1 red capsicum (bell pepper), deseeded and sliced
5 garlic cloves, finely chopped
10 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced

Sauce
1 tablespoon dark soy sauce
1 tablespoon oyster sauce
2 teaspoons grated palm sugar (jaggery)
2 teaspoons fish sauce
1 teaspoon cornflour (cornstarch)

Remove the large shells from the cooked crabs and discard the fibrous tissue under the shell. Divide each crab into 4 portions, breaking each body in half and separating the claws from the body, leaving the legs attached. Drain on paper towel.

If using green peppercorns in brine, rinse and bruise gently. If the fresh drupes are very big, break them into smaller bunches.

To make the sauce, mix together the soy sauce, oyster sauce and palm sugar in a bowl, stirring until dissolved. Add the fish sauce, and 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) water and stir well, then set aside.

To prepare the raw crab, heat half of the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over high heat. Add the capsicum and stir-fry for 2 minutes, or until softened slightly, then remove to a plate.

Heat the remaining oil in the wok and cook the crab over high heat for about 3 minutes, or until it turns bright red. Add the garlic and green peppercorns and cook for a few seconds, then reduce the heat to medium and add the sauce. Cover and cook for 5 minutes. (If using cooked crab, just heat through for 2–3 minutes.) Remove the crab to a plate and set aside.

In a bowl, combine the cornflour and 1 tablespoon cold water to make a smooth paste. Add to the sauce in the wok and stir while it boils and thickens. Return the crab to the wok, add the spring onion and the capsicum and toss to coat.

To serve, arrange the crab on a large serving plate and serve hot with finger bowls and shell plates. White rice is a good foil for the sauce and the heat of the peppercorns.

Note

Although Kep crab traditionally uses blue swimmer crabs, for which the beach town is famous, it will be equally delicious using other crab varieties. Green peppercorns are sold, bottled in brine, in Asian grocery stores. Use them on the drupes, or stems, if possible.

Pa Khing
Steamed fish with young ginger

Serves: 4

750 g (1 lb 11 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
125 g (4½ oz) fresh young ginger
juice of 1 lemon, strained
2 tablespoons peanut oil
1 tablespoon sesame oil
6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
3 tablespoons lightly toasted sesame seeds
2 tablespoons dark soy sauce
four 15 cm (6 in) squares banana leaf
four 15 cm (6 in) squares foil

Wipe the fish with damp paper towel. Cut the fish into serving portions (see preparing whole fish).

Very young ginger is thin-skinned and will not need peeling. The translucent layers of skin will come away easily if scraped with a paring knife. Cut the ginger into paper-thin slices, then into the finest shreds possible. The effect should be thread-like slivers.

Put the ginger and lemon juice in a bowl with the fish, tossing to coat and set aside to marinate.

Heat the peanut and sesame oils in a small frying pan over low heat. Add the garlic and cook until pale golden. Pour the oil and garlic over the ginger, then add the sesame seeds and soy and stir to combine. Rub over the fish fillets to coat.

Place a fish fillet onto each banana leaf and wrap to enclose, then steam the fish in a basket over a wok of simmering water for 15 minutes, or until cooked.

Sousi Pa
Fish with coconut cream

Serves: 4

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
2 large dried red chillies, plus 6 small dried
red chillies extra
1 tablespoon oil
15 garlic cloves
3 makrut (kaffir lime) leaves
1 slice fresh galangal or 1 teaspoon laos (dried galangal) powder
2 stems lemongrass, white part only, thinly sliced
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) thick coconut milk
750 ml (25½ fl oz/3 cups) thin coconut milk
1 tablespoon fish sauce
2 tablespoons chopped roasted peanuts
4 sprigs of fresh basil

Wipe the fish with damp paper towel. Cut the fish into 4 serving portions (see preparing whole fish).

Remove the stalks and seeds from the large dried chillies and soak in hot water for 10 minutes.

Heat the oil in a wok or small heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the small dried chillies and fry until puffed and dark. Set aside.

Using a mortar and pestle, pound the large chillies, garlic, makrut leaves, galangal and lemongrass to a paste. A food processor can be used, but you may need to add 1 tablespoon thick coconut milk to keep the mixture in contact with the blades.

Heat the thick coconut milk in a saucepan over low heat for 10–15 minutes, or until the oil separates. Add the chilli mixture and simmer, stirring

constantly. Add the fish fillets and turn them in the mixture, then add the thin coconut milk and fish sauce and simmer for a further 10 minutes. Add the peanuts just before serving. Garnish with the basil and the small deep-fried chillies.

Noeung Bongkorng
Lobster salad

Serves: 6

250 g (9 oz) cooked lobster tail, reserving the head and shell
250 g (9 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
1–2 pieces dried wood ear fungus
2 tablespoons peanut oil
1 tablespoon dried garlic flakes
125 g (4½ oz) minced (ground) pork
3 tablespoons pounded dried shrimp
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) fish sauce
55 g (2 oz/¼ cup) sugar
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) lime juice
225 g (8 oz/3 cups) shredded Chinese cabbage (wombok)
3 cucumbers, seeds removed and sliced
50 g (1¾ oz/⅓ cup) finely chopped toasted peanuts
30 g (1 oz/⅓ cup) desiccated (shredded) coconut, toasted
salad greens to serve
3 mandarins or oranges, segmented, to serve
3 pickled garlics, thinly sliced, to serve
Vietnamese mint sprigs to serve

Remove the lobster tail, slit the underside, remove the meat in one piece, devein and cut into medallions. Shred the remaining meat from the head into small pieces, reserving the shell for garnish.

Boil the noodles for 10 minutes. Drain and cut into short lengths. Soak the wood ear fungus in hot water for 20 minutes. Drain and finely shred, discarding any woody parts.

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over low heat. Fry the dried garlic flakes until pale golden, remove immediately with a

skimmer and drain on paper towel.

Increase the heat to high, add the pork to the pan and stir-fry until brown. Add the dried shrimp, 1 tablespoon each of the fish sauce and sugar and fry until dry. Remove to a plate and cool.

Combine the remaining fish sauce, sugar and lime juice, stirring until the sugar has dissolved. Add the remaining ingredients and toss well. Arrange on a platter lined with the salad greens. Place the lobster meat on top and garnish with the shell, mandarin, pickled garlic and mint. Serve at room temperature.

Trei Chorm Hoy
Steamed whole fish

Serves: 4

750 g (1 lb 11 oz) whole snapper or other white fish
2 tablespoons light soy sauce
2 tablespoons peanut oil
2 teaspoons sesame oil
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
1 spring onion (scallion), finely chopped

Clean and scale the fish, leaving the head on. Wipe inside the fish cavity with damp paper towel that has first been dipped in coarse salt. Trim any long spines or fins neatly.

Steam the fish over boiling water for 15 minutes, or until cooked through.

Meanwhile, heat the peanut oil in a small saucepan over low heat. Add the ginger and spring onion and cook until soft but not brown. Remove from the heat, add the sesame oil and soy sauce and stir to combine.

Spoon the sauce over the fish on a large serving dish and serve immediately.

Trei Chean Noeung Spei
Deep-fried fish with vegetables

Serves: 4–6

750 g (1 lb 11 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) oil
1 tablespoon egg white
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon cornflour (cornstarch), plus 1 teaspoon extra
1 garlic clove, crushed
½ teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
150 g (5½ oz/2 cups) sliced Chinese cabbage (wombok)
6 spring onions (scallions), cut into 5 cm (2 in) lengths
2 tablespoons fish sauce

Wipe the fish with damp paper towel. Cut the fish into 4 or 6 serving portions (see preparing whole fish).

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Dip the fish in the egg white and then in the combined salt and cornflour, shaking off any excess. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the fish, in batches, for 1–2 minutes, or just long enough to cook it through – the time will vary depending on the thickness of the fish. Drain on paper towel and keep warm.

Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of the oil, add the garlic, ginger and cabbage and stir-fry for 1 minute. Add the spring onion and stir-fry for a further 1 minute. Add the fish sauce and 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) water and bring to the boil.

In a small bowl, combine the extra cornflour with 1 tablespoon cold water to make a smooth paste. Add to the wok and stir until the sauce boils and thickens. Arrange in a dish with the fish pieces on top and serve immediately with rice or noodles.

Amok Trei
Yellow fish curry

This speciality is traditionally made with fish, although you can use chicken. Steamed in a coconut shell or banana leaf basket, this is one of Cambodia's signature dishes. Serve with rice.

Serves: 4

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
2 stems lemongrass, white part only, finely chopped
2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh galangal
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
3 red Asian shallots, finely chopped
2 makrut (kaffir lime) leaves, sliced, plus extra to garnish
1 tablespoon chilli paste (optional)
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
½ teaspoon fermented fish paste (prahok) or dried shrimp paste
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 tablespoon palm sugar (jaggery)
½ teaspoon salt
200 ml (7 fl oz) thick coconut milk
1 egg
150 g (5½ oz/3 cups) baby English spinach leaves, sliced
banana leaves for cooking
thinly sliced chilli to garnish

Wipe the fish with damp paper towel. Cut the fish into small bite-sized pieces.

Put the lemongrass, galangal, garlic, shallots and one of the lime leaves into a food processor with the chilli paste, if using, turmeric, fish paste, fish sauce, palm sugar and salt. Add 1 tablespoon of the coconut milk to help keep the mixture moving over the blades. Place the curry paste in a bowl

and stir in the egg, most of the coconut milk and the spinach, then stir through the fish.

Steam in banana leaf bowls, coconut shells or small dishes lined with banana leaf. Garnish with the remaining coconut milk, finely shredded lime leaf and extra chilli.

Note

If you prefer, omit the egg and simmer the spice mixture with the remaining ingredients in a saucepan for a fragrant yellow curry.

Koy Pa
Raw fish salad

Isn't it fascinating that variations on this theme can be found in so many countries – from the Philippines to Polynesian Islands to Latin American countries. If the idea of eating raw fish makes you cringe, relax. The lemon juice in the marinade changes the texture of the fish. There you go – one step closer to sashimi. And what delights await you there!

Serves: 4–6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) lemon juice
6 tender green beans, thinly sliced
4 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 fresh red chilli, deseeded and sliced
1 tablespoon fish sauce
lettuce leaves to serve
fresh mint leaves to serve
fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves to serve

Wipe the fish with damp paper towel. Cut the fish into very small pieces. Put the fish into a glass or earthenware bowl and pour the lemon juice over the top, tossing to coat. Set aside to marinate for 3 hours, or overnight in the refrigerator.

Combine the fish with all of the beans, spring onion, garlic, chilli and fish sauce. To serve, put some of the fish mixture in the centre of a lettuce leaf, add a sprig of mint or a few coriander leaves. Fold over the lettuce leaves and eat.

Note

If you find the taste of the lemon juice too sharp, add a splash of coconut milk to mellow the flavour.

Kari Bonkong Trasak
Prawn and sweet gourd curry

Serves: 6

1 sweet gourd, tender marrow (summer squash) or 2 green cucumbers
5 garlic cloves
1 small onion, roughly chopped
2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh ginger
½ teaspoon chilli powder
½ teaspoon ground fennel
2 teaspoons ground coriander
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) oil
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) large raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) coconut milk
1 stem lemongrass, bruised
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 teaspoon sugar (optional)
1 tablespoon fish sauce

Peel the gourd, marrow or cucumbers, cut in halves lengthways, scoop out the seeds and cut into thick slices. Put the garlic, onion and ginger into a food processor and process to a purée. Mix in the chilli powder, fennel, coriander and turmeric.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan and cook the onion mixture over low heat for 20 minutes, or until the oil starts to show around the edges and the mixture starts to catch on the base of the pan. Add the prawns and stir-fry for 3 minutes, then add the coconut milk and bring to simmering point. Add the gourd, marrow or cucumber, lemongrass, lemon juice, sugar, if using, and fish sauce and stir gently, simmering for about 5 minutes, or until the gourd, marrow or cucumber is tender but not too soft. Serve hot with rice.

Kai Lao
Laotian chicken

Serves: 6

1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) whole chicken
1½ teaspoon salt, plus ½ teaspoon extra
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tablespoon oil
2 onions, finely chopped
250 g (9 oz) minced (ground) pork
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 fresh red chilli, finely chopped
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaf
100 g (3½ oz/½ cup) long-grain rice
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) thick coconut milk
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) thin coconut milk
1 tablespoon fish sauce

Wash and dry the chicken well, then rub it inside and out with the salt and half of the crushed garlic.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan. Add the remaining garlic, onion and pork and season with the extra salt, the pepper and chilli. Cook the pork until browned, add the coriander, rice and thick coconut milk and bring to a simmer, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook for 10 minutes, or until all of the liquid has been absorbed. Remove from the heat and leave until cool enough to handle.

Stuff the chicken with the pork mixture. Put the chicken into a large saucepan or stockpot with the thin coconut milk and fish sauce, cover, and simmer for 1 hour, or until the chicken is tender and cooked through. Serve with glutinous rice.

Saich Chrouk Jong Kak
Marinated pork skewers

This delicious marinated pork is best barbecued or grilled over hot coals, but even cooked under the grill (broiler), it is very tasty. Chicken thighs may be substituted.

Serves: 6–8

2 stems lemongrass, white part only, finely chopped, or finely grated zest of 3 lemons
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh galangal
3 garlic cloves, crushed
3 red Asian shallots or 1 red onion, chopped
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon chilli powder, or to taste
½ teaspoon salt
3 teaspoons sugar
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) vegetable oil
2 tablespoons grated fresh coconut or desiccated (shredded) coconut soaked in 1 tablespoon hot water
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) pork loin or scotch fillet, cut into strips
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) coconut milk

Soak 24 bamboo skewers in water to prevent them from burning during cooking.

Put the lemongrass, galangal, garlic, shallots, fish sauce, turmeric, chilli powder, salt, sugar and vegetable oil into a food processor and process to make a smooth paste. Alternatively, pound together using a mortar and pestle.

By hand, mix together the spice paste with the coconut and pork to thoroughly coat the meat. Cover and marinate in the refrigerator for at least

3 hours or overnight.

Thread the pork strips onto the skewers and grill or barbecue over hot coals, turning often, until cooked through and browned all over. Serve hot with rice and a Green mango salad.

Khor Mrech Saich Chrouk
Cambodian caramelised pepper pork

The method of making a caramel and then cooking the meat in the same pot is also practised in Vietnam. Here is a variation on a traditional Cambodian recipe.

Serves: 4–6

2 tablespoons sugar
3 garlic cloves, chopped
2 tablespoons fish sauce
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon grated palm sugar (jaggery)
750 g (1 lb 11 oz) pork belly, cut into cubes
2 teaspoons finely grated fresh ginger
155 g (5½ oz/1 cup) peeled and diced sweet potato or pumpkin (winter squash)
1 handful fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves and stems, chopped

Put the sugar and 1 tablespoon water into a large saucepan or stockpot and heat until it starts to bubble, stirring constantly until the mixture is a golden colour. Immediately add 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) water, the garlic, fish sauce, pepper and palm sugar, and stir while it comes to a boil. Add the pork, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 45 minutes, or until the pork is tender. Add the ginger and sweet potato and continue to simmer for a further 15 minutes, or until the sweet potato is tender and most of the liquid has been absorbed. Stir in the coriander briefly, then serve hot with white rice.

Note

In Cambodia, this dish often includes hardboiled quail or duck eggs. If using, mix the peeled eggs through the finished dish to heat through with the coriander.

Moan Chua Noeung Phset Kream
Stir-fried chicken with mushrooms

Serves: 4–6

6 dried shiitake mushrooms
1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) whole chicken
2 tablespoons oil
4 garlic cloves, crushed
½ teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
2 tablespoons fish sauce
2 teaspoons sugar
2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves to garnish

Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes. Drain well, cut off and discard the stems and thinly slice the caps.

Joint the chicken and cut into serving pieces.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the garlic and ginger and cook for a few seconds, then add the chicken and stir-fry until the colour changes. Add the mushroom, fish sauce, sugar and 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) water, cover, and simmer for 30 minutes, or until the chicken is cooked. Garnish with coriander and serve with rice.

Burma

I was too young to remember my first visit to my grandmother's home in Rangoon, Burma, but the second visit, which lasted a year, has left a medley of impressions. My most vivid memories of Burma are of glittering golden pagodas and delicious food. I recall saving my pocket money to buy snacks from the vendors who streamed through the suburban streets calling their wares. In the evenings we often visited the bazaar where the streets were lined with food stalls of every kind.

Snacks, sweets, cool drinks, complete meals – each stall specialised in one particular item. What I liked best was fresh sugar cane juice, extracted from cane crushed between large, shiny steel rollers and poured on to ice clinking in tall glasses.

My mother, who was born in Mandalay, had left Burma as a young bride to live in Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), so Burma was a country new and fascinating to me. It was during this second visit that I first met Aunt Connie, my mother's youngest sister. She made an impression at least as deep and lasting as those made by my favourite foods.

The next time we met was in England, where I had been sent to finish my education. Happily, Connie was spending a year there and I lived with her delightful family in a beautiful country house, one of the happiest times of my life.

Because she lived for many years in Burma and cooked delicious Burmese food, I asked for her help in making this chapter the best possible source of information on Burmese food. Thanks to my wonderful aunt, Constance Hancock, and Mrs Ida Htoon Phay I have added to the Burmese recipes learned from my mother and grandmother. ‘Cooking should not be a chore,’ wrote Connie. ‘The busy housewife must use her head and try to make life a little easier for herself if she wants to venture into exotic cooking. So, in order not to spend a fortune on air-fresheners every time she prepares strong-smelling foods, it is useful to know that onions, garlic and curry ingredients can be cooked in large quantities and stored in jars or in the freezer.

‘One cup (9 oz/250 g) of curry ingredients is sufficient for a 1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) chicken or 750 g (1 lb 11 oz) of beef, lamb or pork. As fish and meat curries are made from the same basic curry ingredients there is no problem. To the basic ingredients I add, as the recipe requires, other spices or herbs which make the dish taste the way it should.’

Family and friends who turned up unexpectedly would be amazed that she could start from scratch and produce a whole meal in less than an hour. The dish that took longest to cook would be started first and so on. She’d always have a supply of crisp fried brown onions and garlic, pounded dried prawns and balachaung, as well as hot mango pickles and chutneys. Her deep freezer would hold treasures like chopped coriander (cilantro) leaves and green and red capsicums (bell peppers) cut into pieces, so she could take out only what was required.

Serving and eating a Burmese meal

The cornerstone of a Burmese meal is, as elsewhere in Asia, a dish of perfectly cooked, steaming hot, fluffy rice. This is brought to the table just before or after guests are seated so that it will be hot. The soup too is always piping hot, but for the rest, the dishes are placed on the table beforehand and many of the accompaniments are served at room temperature.

A table set for a meal is a colourful sight. The various dishes served should complement or contrast. Plain soups with rich, oily curries; stronger soups with mild dishes. There should always be one chilli condiment; one raw salad of leaves, fruit or vegetables; one soup; one, two or three curries of meat, fish, prawns (shrimp) or eggs; perhaps a bowl of lentils, a homemade pickle, and almost always that Burmese favourite, balachaung. There is no set rule as to which dishes should be served together, so an unlimited number of combinations is possible. The table is set with plates for the rice, bowls and porcelain spoons for soup. It is customary to eat a Burmese meal with the fingers, but nowadays spoons and forks are also used. There are some Burmese meals, though, that must be eaten with the fingers – read about lethoke on Htamin Lethoke. In this case a bowl of hot water, soap and a towel are placed on a side table for hand washing before one is seated.

When one does begin, it is polite to start with small portions. Not too much rice first, then one tiny helping from one of the dishes to be mixed with the rice and tasted, then something from another dish, and so on. When all the dishes have been sampled, the decision is made whether to stick to one particular dish or to combine various flavours. Spoonfuls of soup are taken between mouthfuls of rice and curries. After the meal the hands are washed again. Fruit or a cooling sweet and cups of steaming hot tea follow.

There are certain Burmese meals where a one-dish speciality is featured, such as Moh hin gha, kaukswe (Panthe Kaukswe and Kaukswe Kyaw) or Htamin lethoke. These are do-it-yourself specials where rice or noodles is served with flavoursome accompaniments and you create your own masterpiece. When you sit down to this kind of meal there is no guarantee that your food will taste exactly like the next person's. You will help yourself from the same dishes, but from there on it becomes an improvisation. Do you want a gently seasoned meal? Or one so hot it brings tears to your eyes? There will be chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves, garlic slices fried crisp and golden, piquant tamarind water, hot chilli powder or fried whole chillies, brilliant red chilli oil, rich brown fried onions, sliced spring onions (scallions), nutty-flavoured roasted besan (chickpea flour). Depending on the proportions in which you add these you create a taste sensation made to order – just as *you* like it. If you feel you

need help, it is considered quite the thing to do to ask someone if you can taste their meal – or ask them to taste yours and advise on what is needed, or even to mix your portion for you … all delightfully informal.

Burmese curries

The ingredients basic to all Burmese curries never vary – onion, garlic, ginger, chilli and turmeric. The chilli can be used in powder form, or whole dried chillies can be ground with the other ingredients, but chilli is used sparingly and may be omitted. To make a curry for four people using 750 g (1 lb 11 oz) meat, fish or poultry, here is a well-balanced mixture: 1 large onion, 2–3 garlic cloves, 1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger, ½ teaspoon ground turmeric and ¼ teaspoon chilli powder, using 2–3 tablespoons oil for frying.

Animal fat of any sort is never used. Light sesame oil is best for capturing the true Burmese flavour. If corn, peanut, sunflower or other vegetable oil is used, add a small amount of Chinese-style dark sesame oil for flavour in the proportions of 1 teaspoon sesame oil to 1 tablespoon vegetable oil.

There is only one way to cook these basic ingredients in order to achieve a mellow flavour in which no single ingredient predominates. Grind the onion, garlic and ginger to a purée. In the absence of the Asian grinding stone, this is best done in a food processor, first chopping the ingredients roughly. It will be necessary to stop the motor frequently and scrape down the sides. When puréed, smoothly mix in the turmeric and chilli powder.

Heat the oil in a saucepan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, add the ground ingredients, then reduce the heat and stir well to combine. Cover the pan and simmer the mixture, lifting the lid frequently to stir and scrape the base of the pan with a wooden spoon. This initial frying takes at least 15 minutes. If the mixture cooks too rapidly and begins to stick before the smell has mellowed and the onions become translucent, add a small quantity of water from time to time and stir well. When the water content of the onion has evaporated and the ingredients turn a rich red-brown colour with oil showing around the edge, the first stage of cooking, and the most important one, is complete.

There is a Burmese term to describe this – *byan*, meaning 'oil returned', that is, with the water completely evaporated and the oil returned to just oil. The basic ingredients will not have the required flavour unless this procedure is followed. The meat, fish or vegetables added will release their own juices while cooking slowly in the pan with the lid on. A roasting chicken will be sufficiently cooked by the time its own juices have evaporated. Boiling fowls, duck, some cuts of beef and pork may need a little water added from time to time as cooking continues until they are tender. Fish and prawns (shrimp) cook very quickly but some types may need a little more fish stock, water or coconut milk added. Vegetables seldom require any added liquid, but if a wetter result is preferred add water or coconut milk.

Burmese sweets

Burmese meals do not include desserts, but fresh fruits in season are served after a meal. Between meals, however, sweets are eaten to satisfy a sweet tooth, or taken in the form of a cooling drink such as Moh-let-saung. Then there is durian preserve (just as strong smelling as the fruit and arousing as much passionate discussion), mango preserve, wild plums cooked in palm sugar (jaggery) treacle and palm sugar toffee.

Agar-agar is the base of many jelly preparations. They are much firmer than jellies served in Western countries. There are also a number of cakes, fritters, doughnuts and steamed sponges made from finely ground rice flour and sweetened with palm sugar. They may be served with palm sugar treacle, freshly grated coconut, toasted sesame seeds and quite often a pinch of salt. The contrast is surprisingly pleasant. Unlike Indian sweetmeats, Burmese specialities are only slightly sweet.

Most Burmese sweets, snacks and drinks are prepared and sold by professional sweet makers, and each sweet maker specialises in only one variety. They are not made at home, for they require special equipment and hours of preparation. The very mention of *moh sein boung* (steamed sponge cake) is enough to make an expatriate Burmese go misty eyed. This is a beautiful, light-textured rice flour sponge steamed in tall moulds in two

layers of white and brown – the brown gets its colour from palm sugar. Hawked through the streets at breakfast time, it is eaten off banana leaves with a sprinkle of grated coconut and a mixture of crushed toasted sesame seeds and salt – not very sweet or rich, but very satisfying.

Utensils

Like other Asian kitchens, that of a Burmese household is simply equipped. A brick fireplace for charcoal or wood fires, or a portable charcoal brazier; a selection of pots and pans, nothing that cannot be replaced by a Western-style utensil except the *dare-oh*, a rounded, deep pan in heavy iron with two handles, similar to the Chinese wok; the large flat grinding stone, a stone mortar and pestle and the usual colander, sieve, wooden and bamboo spatulas, skewers and ladles, sharp choppers and knives. Every recipe in this chapter can be prepared without any special equipment except, perhaps, a wok. As I have said in other chapters, the cook's best friend when handling ingredients that would, in the country of origin, be prepared on the grinding stone, is a powerful and efficient food processor or electric blender.

Your Burmese shelf

This is a list of spices, sauces, sambals and other flavourings that are often used in Burmese cooking and good to have on hand to make the recipes in this chapter.

besan (chickpea flour)
cardamom, ground
cellophane (bean thread) noodles
chilli powder
cloves, ground
coconut, desiccated (shredded)
coconut milk
corn oil or peanut oil
cumin, ground
dried prawn (shrimp) powder

dried seaweed (kyauk pwint) (see note)
dried shrimp
dried shrimp paste
egg noodles
fish sauce
paprika, ground
rice vermicelli (rice-stick) noodles
roasted chickpeas (garbanzo beans) (see note)
sesame oil
sesame seeds
shiitake mushrooms, dried
soy sauce, light and dark
turmeric, ground
wood ear fungus, dried

Note

Roasted chickpeas are available from Mediterranean or Middle Eastern grocery stores. If you can't find the Burmese dried seaweed (kyauk pwint), substitute with the Japanese variety; known as hijiki.

Rice, Noodles and Soups

Htamin
Rice

Always use long-grain rice for Burmese meals. Allow 200 g (7 oz/1 cup) rice for 2 or 3 people. For every 200 g of long-grain rice allow 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) water. For each cup of rice additional to the first cup, allow 375 ml (12½ fl oz/1½ cups) water.

200 g (7 oz/1 cup) rice // 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) water
400 g (14 oz/2 cups) rice // 875 ml (291/2 fl oz/3½ cups) water
600 g (1 lb 5 oz/3 cups) rice // 1.25 litres (42 fl oz/5 cups) water

Wash the rice well and drain in a colander for 30 minutes. Put the rice and water into a saucepan and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low, give it a good stir, then cover and cook for 20 minutes, without lifting the lid or stirring, until the rice is tender and all the liquid has been absorbed.

See Htamin
Oil rice

Serves: 4–6

400 g (14 oz/2 cups) glutinous rice
1½ teaspoons ground turmeric
3 large onions, thinly sliced
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) oil
2 teaspoons salt
80 g (2¾ oz/½ cup) lightly toasted sesame seeds, bruised and mixed with salt

Wash the rice well and drain a in colander for 30 minutes. Sprinkle the turmeric over the onion in a bowl and toss lightly.

Heat the oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until brown. Remove two-thirds of the onion and set aside.

Add the rice to the pan and stir well to coat, then add 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) water and salt and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer for 20 minutes, or until the rice is tender and the water is absorbed. Some people like a crust on the rice – leave the rice over low heat for 5–10 minutes longer until a slight crackling sound is heard. Serve garnished with fried onion, accompanied by the sesame seeds. Serve by itself, not with curries.

Htamin Lethoke
Rice mixed with fingers

The literal translation of the Burmese name suggests what to expect. Each person helps themself to one or more of the main ingredients and some of each of the accompaniments. The only way to really enjoy this type of food is to use one's fingers to mix and eat it. It is a fun thing, and although the ingredients are numerous, very little cooking is involved. If a stock of the basics is kept in the pantry, a 'lethoke' meal can be served in next to no time.

Serves: 6

200 g (7 oz/1 cup) long-grain rice
2 fresh red chillies or 1 teaspoon chilli powder
2 tablespoons oil
125 g (4½ oz) rice vermicelli (rice-stick) noodles
60 g (2 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
125 g (4½ oz) fine egg noodles
3 large potatoes, boiled, peeled and sliced
60 g (2 oz) dried seaweed (kyauk pwint) (optional), soaked in boiling water for 10 minutes, then drained
245 g (8½ oz/2¾ cups) fresh bean sprouts, trimmed and blanched

Accompaniments
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) oil
3 eggs, lightly beaten
10 onions, thinly sliced
20 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) tamarind pulp
250 g (9 oz/1 cup) dried prawn (shrimp) powder
220 g (8 oz/1 cup) roasted ground chickpeas (garbanzo beans) (see note)
2 tablespoons chilli powder
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) fish sauce

Wash the rice well and drain in a colander for 30 minutes. Put the rice and 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) water into a saucepan and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low, give it a good stir, then cover and cook for 20 minutes, without lifting the lid or stirring, until the rice is tender and all the liquid has been absorbed – it should be dry and fluffy.

Pound the chillies to a paste, then place in a frying pan with the oil and 2 tablespoons water and cook over low heat. When the chilli smells cooked, mix with the boiled rice and set aside.

Boil the rice vermicelli noodles for 2 minutes, or until tender. Drain and set aside. Cook the cellophane noodles in a saucepan of boiling water until tender, then drain and set aside. Cook the egg noodles in a saucepan of boiling water until just tender. Drain and refresh immediately in cold water so that the noodles do not stick together.

All the main ingredients for lethoke are served cold. Arrange the rice, noodles, potato, seaweed, if using, and bean sprouts separately on a serving platter. The accompaniments in their individual bowls are placed on the table.

To make the accompaniments, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Pour in half of the egg to make an omelette, then remove to a plate. Repeat with the remaining egg. When cool, slice into fine strips.

Put half of the onion in a bowl and wash well in cold water, then drain well and place in a serving dish.

Heat the remaining oil in a frying pan over low heat. Add the remaining onion and half of the garlic and cook in the oil until light brown, then transfer to a serving bowl. The remaining garlic can be placed into a small bowl and served raw for intrepid garlic eaters.

Soak the tamarind pulp in 375 ml (12½ fl oz/1½ cups) hot water for 10 minutes. Squeeze to dissolve the pulp in the water, then strain, discarding the seeds and fibre. Place in a serving dish.

Put the dried prawn powder, ground chickpeas, chilli powder and fish sauce into separate serving dishes and serve.

Note

Use roasted chickpeas from Middle Eastern grocery stores, ground to a powder.

Ohn Htamin
Coconut rice

Serves: 6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz/2½ cups) long-grain rice
1.25 litres (42 fl oz/5 cups) thin coconut milk
2½ teaspoons salt

Wash the rice well and drain in a colander for 30 minutes. Put the rice, coconut milk and salt into a saucepan and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low, give it a good stir, then cover and cook for 20 minutes, without lifting the lid or stirring. If all the coconut milk is not absorbed at the end of this time, stir very lightly around the edges of the pan with a fork, just to mix in the milk, then replace the lid and continue cooking over low heat for a further 5–10 minutes. Serve hot with any of the Burmese curries, fried prawns (shrimp) or pork oil, pickles and Pounded prawn paste.

Kyazan
Cellophane noodles

The main ingredient in this dish (pronounced ‘chah-zan’) is cellophane (bean thread) noodles; fine, translucent and with no flavour of their own, they are flavoured by what you eat with them. They are served with Chicken curry with noodles and appropriate accompaniments.

Serves: 6–8

375 g (13 oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles

Bring a large saucepan of salted water to the boil, drop in the noodles and cook for 20 minutes. Drain. Serve in a large bowl.

Serving is easier if the noodles are cut into shorter lengths with a sharp knife or with kitchen scissors.

Each person puts some noodles in a bowl, ladles the chicken curry or some soup over the top and adds whichever accompaniments are desired (see Htamin Lethoke).

Hin
Burmese soups

In Burma, a light-bodied piping hot soup is served at both main meals of the day. It can be a clear mild soup or a sour peppery soup, depending on the weather or the other items on the menu. These soups are not served as a first course, but for sipping throughout a meal.

Hin Cho
Mild soup

Any of the following vegetables may be used in this recipe: thinly sliced marrow (summer squash), zucchini (courgette), pumpkin (winter squash), okra, cauliflower florets, cabbage, Chinese cabbage (wombok) or other leaves.

Serves: 4–6

1–1.5 litres (34–51 fl oz/4–6 cups) stock or water
2 onions, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon dried prawn (shrimp) powder or 3 raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined
3 whole black peppercorns
¼ teaspoon dried shrimp paste (optional)
200–300 g (7–10½ oz/2–3 cups) mixed vegetables

Put the stock in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Add the onion, dried prawn powder, peppercorns and dried shrimp paste, if using, and boil for 5 minutes.

Add the mixed vegetables and raw prawns, if using, to the pan – pumpkin and cauliflower may take about 5 minutes to cook sufficiently, but most other vegetables should be done in about 3 minutes. Add salt to taste and serve hot.

Chin Hin
Sour soup

Sour greens, such as tender young tamarind leaves, are traditionally used to make the stock for this soup (or substitute green tomatoes or rhubarb stalks). If rhubarb stalks are being used, cut them into short lengths and boil, then strain and use the liquid combined with English spinach leaves or other green leaves.

Serves: 4–6

2 teaspoons sesame oil or corn oil
1 onion, thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
2–3 green (unripe) tomatoes, chopped
25 g (1 oz/1 cup) loosely packed English spinach leaves or other green leaves
1–1.5 litres (34–51 fl oz/4–6 cups) rhubarb stock, fish stock or boiling water
¼ teaspoon dried shrimp paste

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over low heat. Add the onion, garlic and turmeric, stirring for 30 seconds. Add the tomato and spinach, stir well, then add the stock and bring to the boil. Add the dried shrimp paste, cover, and simmer until all the vegetables are tender. Season with salt to taste. Serve with rice.

Hin Gha
Strong soup

Serves: 4–6

1–1.5 litres (34–51 fl oz/4–6 cups) stock or water
2 onions, thinly sliced
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 tablespoon dried prawn (shrimp) powder or 3 raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined
3 whole black peppercorns
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
¼ teaspoon dried shrimp paste (optional)
200–300 g (7–10½ oz/2–3 cups) mixed chopped vegetables

Put the stock in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Add the onion, garlic, dried prawn powder, peppercorns, pepper and dried shrimp paste, if using, and boil for 5 minutes.

Add the mixed vegetables and raw prawns, if using, to the pan – pumpkin and cauliflower may take about 5 minutes to cook sufficiently, but most other vegetables should be done in about 3 minutes. Add salt to taste and serve hot.

Kyazain Hin Cho
Mild soup with cellophane noodles

It is difficult to measure a small amount of cellophane noodles by weight as they are so light, or by volume as they are so unwieldy. If in doubt, use a 10 cm (4 in) bunch of the strands which fits in the crook of your finger.

Serves: 4

50 g (1¾ oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
1.25 litres (42 fl oz/5 cups) chicken or pork stock
1 onion, thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
6 button mushrooms, sliced
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
125 g (4½ oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined
1 zucchini (courgette), thinly sliced in discs

Soak the noodles in hot water for 20 minutes, then drain and cut into short lengths.

Put the stock into a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Add the onion, garlic and noodles and cook until they are swollen and soft. Add the mushroom, soy sauce, prawns and zucchini and cook until the prawns just start to turn pink. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serve hot.

Wet Che Dauk Hincho
Pig trotter soup

Serves: 4

1 pig's trotter (front preferably)
2 tablespoons light soy sauce
3 onions, finely chopped
6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 small handful fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves or celery leaves, chopped

Wash and clean the pig's trotter, then chop into 4 pieces. Rub over the soy sauce to coat.

Put the pig's trotter into a large saucepan with 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) water and bring to the boil, removing any scum that rises to the surface. When the trotter is tender, remove it with a slotted spoon, remove the meat, discarding the bones, and return to the soup.

Add the onion and garlic to the stock and continue simmering for a further 10 minutes. Add the coriander leaves and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serve hot with rice.

Moh Hin Gha
Rice vermicelli with fish soup

Serves: 6–8

The national dish of Burma, moh hin gha, is to the Burmese what onion soup is to the French.

Accompaniments:
spring onion (scallion), thinly sliced
fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
white onion, thinly sliced
roasted ground chickpeas (garbanzo beans)
crisp fried noodles, broken into small pieces
fried shallots
garlic cloves, thinly sliced and deep-fried in oil until golden
lemon wedges
dried red chillies, deep-fried whole in oil for 5 seconds
chilli powder

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) strong-flavoured fish fillets or 2 tins herrings in tomato sauce (ketchup)
4 onions, roughly chopped
6 garlic cloves, peeled
2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh ginger
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon chilli powder
2 tablespoons sesame oil
80 ml (2½ fl oz/⅓ cup) peanut oil
2 fresh chillies, deseeded and chopped
1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) thin coconut milk
1 banana heart or 250 g (9 oz/1 cup) tinned bamboo shoots
1 teaspoon dried shrimp paste
1 tablespoon fish sauce

1 tablespoon besan (chickpea flour)
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) thick coconut milk
2 tablespoons lemon juice
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) rice vermicelli (rice-stick) noodles or fine egg noodles

Put the fish in a frying pan with just enough water to cover and simmer for 5 minutes. Drain and set aside, reserving the stock.

Put the onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric and chilli powder into a food processor and process to a purée.

Heat the sesame and peanut oils in a large saucepan and cook the onion mixture and chillies over low heat for 20 minutes, or until the oil returns and the mixture starts to stick to the pan. Add the fish stock, thin coconut milk and banana heart. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer until the banana heart slices are tender. Dissolve the dried shrimp paste in the fish sauce and add to the pan. Mix the besan smoothly with a little cold water or some of the thick coconut milk and add to the pan, stirring constantly as it comes to the boil. Simmer for 5 minutes, add the fish, thick coconut milk and lemon juice, stirring until heated through. Season with salt to taste.

Cook the noodles in a saucepan of boiling water until tender. Drain and serve in a large bowl alongside the soup. Have small bowls with accompaniments ready on the table. Noodles are served first and soup ladled over the top. Moh hin gha must be served piping hot.

Kyazan Hin Gha
Cellophane noodle soup with pepper

Serves: 4–6

50 g (1¾ oz) cellophane (bean thread) noodles
½ small chicken
6 dried shiitake mushrooms
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 tablespoon oil
2 onions, thinly sliced
6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
3 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
3 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
chilli powder to serve
lemon wedges to serve

Soak the noodles in hot water for 20 minutes, then drain and cut into short lengths. Joint the chicken.

Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes, then drain, cut off and discard the stems and thinly slice the caps.

Put the chicken pieces into a saucepan with the fish sauce and 2 litres (68 fl oz/8 cups) water and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 20 minutes, or until the chicken is tender. Remove from the heat, drain the chicken, reserving the stock. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, discard the skin and bones and use your fingers to shred the meat into small pieces.

Heat the oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook until the onion is soft. Add the pepper, reserved stock, noodles and mushroom. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the chicken and heat through, then add salt to taste. Remove

from the heat, sprinkle with the coriander leaves and spring onion and serve hot, with a small bowl of chilli powder and the lemon wedges served separately for seasoning individual portions.

Gooraka Thee Kyawjet Hin
Choko soup

Serves: 4–6

2 chokos (chayotes)
1 tablespoon oil
1 large onion, thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon dried shrimp
½ teaspoon dried shrimp paste
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric

Peel the chokos, halve them lengthways and cut into thin slices.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, choko, dried shrimp, dried shrimp paste and turmeric and cook for a few minutes, stirring constantly. Cover and cook over low heat for 10 minutes, then add 1–1.5 litres (34–51 fl oz/4–6 cups) water and simmer for 10 minutes. Season with salt to taste and serve hot with rice and curries.

Set Hint Myo Hincho
Twelve varieties soup

Serves: 6

5 g (¼ oz/¼ cup) dried shiitake mushrooms
5 g (¼ oz/¼ cup) dried wood ear fungus
2 tablespoons oil
2 onions, thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
125 g (4½ oz) chicken, duck or pork meat, trimmed and thinly sliced
6 slices boiled pork liver
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 small choko (chayote)
25 g (1 oz/¼ cup) fresh bean sprouts, trimmed
15 g (½ oz/¼ cup) shredded cabbage
30 g (1 oz/¼ cup) shredded cauliflower
30 g (1 oz/¼ cup) sliced green beans
6 celery leaves
2 spring onions (scallions)
2 eggs

Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes, then drain well, cut off and discard the stems and thinly slice the caps. Soak the wood ear fungus in hot water for 20 minutes, then drain and set aside.

Heat the oil in a large heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, meat and pork liver and stir well. Add the soy sauce, cover, and cook for 5 minutes.

Add the choko, bean sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, beans, mushroom, wood ear fungus, celery leaves and spring onion, cover, and cook until the vegetables are slightly wilted. Add 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) water, bring to the boil and continue boiling for 10 minutes. Just before serving add the

unbeaten eggs to the rapidly boiling soup and stir. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste and serve hot.

Mains

Pazoon Hin
Prawn curry with gravy

Serves: 4

1 large onion, roughly chopped
1 garlic clove
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
½ teaspoon chilli powder
1 tablespoon sesame oil or corn oil
1 pinch of ground cloves
1 pinch of ground cardamom
1 pinch of ground fennel
1 large potato, diced
2 ripe tomatoes, chopped
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) thin coconut milk
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) thick coconut milk
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
2 tablespoons chopped spring onions (scallions)

Put the onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric and chilli powder into a food processor and process to a purée.

Heat the sesame oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan and cook the onion mixture over low heat for 20 minutes, or until the oil returns and the mixture starts to stick to the pan. Stir in the cloves, cardamom, fennel, potato and tomato, cover and cook for 10 minutes, or until fragrant. Add the thin coconut milk and gently simmer, uncovered, for a further 10 minutes, then add the prawns and thick coconut milk and simmer, stirring frequently for about 3 minutes, or until the prawns are cooked. Add the coriander leaves and cook for a further 3 minutes, then remove from the heat and stir

in the spring onion. Season with salt to taste. Serve hot with white rice and accompaniments.

Nga Soke Lone Hin
Fish kofta curry

My grandmother taught me how to make this delicious fish curry. There is no use pretending it is a quick and easy recipe, but it is the tastiest way of serving fish. For a more delicate dish, poach the fish koftas in simmering water and serve as a fish soup with boiled rice.

Serves: 6

Fish koftas

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets, such as jewfish or cod
2½ teaspoons salt
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 onion, finely chopped
1 garlic clove, crushed
1½ teaspoons finely grated fresh ginger
2 tablespoons lemon juice, strained
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves or dill
2 slices white bread, soaked in hot water and squeezed dry
1 teaspoon anchovy paste (optional)

Curry

60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) sesame oil
3 onions, finely chopped
6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh ginger
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
2 tomatoes, peeled and chopped
1½ teaspoons salt
1–2 teaspoons chilli powder (optional)
1 teaspoon paprika (optional)
1 teaspoon dried shrimp paste

2 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
2 tablespoons lemon juice

To make the kofta, finely mince (grind) the fish fillets in a food processor, taking care to remove the bones first. Place in a large bowl and add all the remaining ingredients. Use your hands to mix together thoroughly and shape into small balls, with a 3 cm (1¼ in) diameter – you should make about 24 balls in total.

To make the curry, heat the oil in a large heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic and ginger and cook until soft and golden. Add the turmeric, then remove from the heat and add the tomato, salt and the chilli powder and paprika, if using. (In Burmese cooking the amount of chilli used would be enough to give a red colour to the sauce, but the paprika is suggested here as a substitute for a portion of it, with chilli used to suit individual tastes.)

Wrap the dried shrimp paste in a piece of foil and roast under a preheated grill (broiler) for 5 minutes, turning halfway through. Unwrap, dissolve in 375 ml (12½ fl oz/1½ cups) hot water and add to the pan, stirring until the tomato is soft and pulpy. If the sauce starts to dry out, add a little hot water – there should be enough sauce to almost cover the fish koftas. Gently put the fish koftas in the sauce and simmer over medium heat for about 20 minutes, shaking the pan from time to time, until cooked through. Do not stir until the fish is cooked and firm, or the koftas might break. Stir in the coriander and lemon juice and cook for a further 5 minutes. Serve with white rice and balachaung.

Pazoon Kyaw (1)
Fried prawns

Serves: 4

1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon chilli powder
16 raw large prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined
2 tablespoons sesame oil
2 tablespoons peanut oil

Mix together the salt, turmeric and chilli powder in a bowl. Add the prawns and toss to coat in the spice mixture. Thread 4 prawns onto each skewer.

Heat the sesame and peanut oils in a large heavy-based frying pan over high heat. Cook the prawn skewers, turning once, until cooked through and golden. Serve hot.

Pazoon Kyaw (2)
Stir-fried prawns with vegetables

Serves: 4

1 tablespoon oil
1 onion, thinly sliced
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined (halved if large)
240 g (8½ oz/2⅔ cups) fresh bean sprouts, trimmed or 150 g (5½ oz/2 cups) shredded cabbage
2 teaspoons light soy sauce (optional)

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over high heat. Add the onion and cook for a few seconds, then add the prawns and bean sprouts and stir-fry for 3 minutes, or until the prawns change colour. Season with salt, freshly ground black pepper and soy sauce to taste. Serve immediately.

Nga See Byan
Fish curry without gravy

Serves: 4–6

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) firm white fish fillets
¼ teaspoon dried shrimp paste or 2 teaspoons fish sauce
2 onions, roughly chopped
1 garlic clove
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
1 stem lemongrass or 2 strips lemon zest
1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 green chilli, deseeded and split lengthways (optional)
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) vegetable oil
fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves, chopped, to garnish

Cut the fish into serving pieces (see preparing whole fish).

Dissolve the shrimp paste in 1 tablespoon hot water and rub over the fish to coat. Set aside.

Put the onion, garlic, ginger, lemongrass, salt, turmeric and chilli into a food processor and process to a purée.

Heat the vegetable oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan and cook the onion mixture over low heat for 20 minutes, or until the oil returns and the mixture starts to stick to the pan. Add the fish and cook for 3–4 minutes on each side until cooked through. Sprinkle with the coriander and serve hot.

Nga Tha Lauk Paung
Soused fish

Serves: 4

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) whole fish, such as herring or mackerel, cleaned and scaled, head, fins and tail removed
1 onion, thinly sliced
4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 teaspoon finely shredded fresh ginger
5 whole black peppercorns
½ teaspoon salt, or to taste
1 fresh green chilli
vinegar

Preheat the oven to 110°C (230°F).

Put the fish in a casserole dish and scatter over the onion, garlic, ginger, peppercorns and salt. Put the chilli on top and add just enough vinegar to cover the fish. Cover the casserole with a tight-fitting lid and seal with a thick dough of flour and water to prevent moisture escaping. Cook the fish for 6 hours – this method of cooking helps to soften the bones.

Nga Baung Doke (1)
Fish steamed in leaves

Serves: 4

750 g (1 lb 11 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
8 mustard cabbage (gai choy) or English spinach leaves
eight 20 cm (8 in) squares banana leaf or foil
2 onions, thinly sliced
4 garlic cloves
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
¼ teaspoon chilli powder (optional)
1 tablespoon thick coconut milk
1 tablespoon ground rice
2 teaspoons sesame oil
3–4 sprigs fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

Cut the fish into 8 serving portions (see preparing whole fish). Sprinkle over half of the combined salt, pepper and turmeric. Set aside.

Slice the thick middle rib out of the mustard cabbage leaves and discard. Scald the banana leaves in boiling water or hold them over a flame to make them pliable.

Put half of the onion into a food processor with the garlic, ginger, chilli powder, if using, and coconut milk and process to a purée. Stir in the remaining salt, pepper and turmeric, then add the ground rice and sesame oil. Pour over the fish and toss to coat.

On each square of banana leaf put a leaf of mustard cabbage and on it a piece of fish and some of the onion mixture. Top with a few coriander leaves and some of the remaining onion. Wrap the fish first in the cabbage

leaf, then make a parcel with the banana leaf. Fasten with short bamboo skewers or wooden toothpicks. Alternatively wrap in foil.

Cook the fish in a steamer basket over gently boiling water for 20–25 minutes. Serve in the leaves. Guests open their parcels on their own plates. Serve with rice and other accompaniments, such as balachaung.

Nga Baung Doke (2)
Sesame coconut fish steamed in leaves

Serves: 6

1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) skinless, boneless, firm white fish fillets
six 30 cm (12 in) squares banana leaf and foil
90 g (3 oz/1 cup) desiccated (shredded) coconut
2 garlic cloves
1 tablespoon finely grated fresh ginger
2 tablespoons lightly toasted sesame seeds
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
juice of ½ lemon
2 tablespoons rice flour
3 tablespoons chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

Cut the fish into 8 serving portions (see preparing whole fish).

Scald the banana leaves in boiling water or hold them over a flame to make them pliable.

Put the coconut, garlic and ginger into a food processor with 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) hot water and process to a smooth paste. Stir in the sesame seeds, salt, turmeric, pepper, lemon juice, rice flour and coriander leaves.

Put a fish portion on a square of banana leaf, top with 1 tablespoon of the coconut mixture and wrap in a parcel to enclose, then wrap in a layer of foil.

Cook the fish in a steamer basket over gently boiling water for 15 minutes. Serve hot.

Pazoon See Byan Hin
Dry prawn curry

Serves: 4

1 large onion, roughly chopped
3–4 garlic cloves
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
¼ teaspoon chilli powder
1 tablespoon light sesame oil or corn oil
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves
2 tablespoons chopped spring onions (scallions)

Put the onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric and chilli powder into a food processor and process to a purée.

Heat the sesame oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan and cook the onion mixture over low heat for 20 minutes, or until the oil returns and the mixture starts to stick to the pan. Add the prawns and coriander and cook for 3–4 minutes, or until the prawns turn pink. Stir in the spring onion and serve hot with white rice and accompaniments.

Panthe Kaukswe
Chicken curry with noodles

This chicken curry with noodles has a mild curry flavour with lots of gravy. The curry is ladled over a bowl of noodles and served with a number of accompaniments with contrasting flavours. You can use thin egg noodles rather than cellophane noodles if you prefer.

Serves: 6–8

1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) whole chicken or chicken thighs, wings or drumsticks
5 garlic cloves, chopped
3 onions, chopped
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh ginger
1 teaspoon dried shrimp paste
2 tablespoons peanut oil
1 tablespoon sesame oil
1–2 teaspoons chilli powder
2 teaspoons salt
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) thin coconut milk
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) thick coconut milk
2 tablespoons besan (chickpea flour)
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) Cellophane noodles (Kyazan) to serve
accompaniments for Moh hin gha

If using a whole chicken, joint it into portions (see Jointing a chicken).

Put the garlic, onion, ginger and dried shrimp paste into a food processor and process to make a smooth paste, adding 1 tablespoon of the peanut oil if needed.

Heat the remaining peanut oil and sesame oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over low heat. Add the onion mixture and cook for 5 minutes, then add the chicken and continue to cook, stirring constantly. Add the chilli powder, salt and thin coconut milk and simmer until the chicken is

tender, adding a little hot water if the mixture becomes too dry. Add the thick coconut milk and bring to the boil, stirring constantly to prevent the mixture from curdling. Mix the besan with just enough cold water to a make a smooth cream, and add to the pan, cooking for a further 5 minutes (there should be a lot of gravy).

Serve the curry and noodles separately. Each person takes a serving of noodles, ladles over a generous amount of the curry and sprinkles the various accompaniments over the top. Everything is mixed together and a lemon wedge squeezed over to add piquancy. The crisp fried chillies are held by the stalk and bitten into (with caution, please, if this is your first attempt) when a hot mouthful is desired.

Kaukswe Kyaw
Mixed fried noodles with chicken

Serves: 6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) egg noodles
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) oil
4–5 dried shiitake mushrooms
5 onions, chopped
5 garlic cloves, chopped
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) boneless skinless chicken breasts or thighs, thinly sliced
1 chicken liver, thinly sliced
1 chicken gizzard, parboiled, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons light soy sauce
½ cabbage, shredded
½ Chinese cabbage (wombok), shredded
2 celery stalks, finely chopped
6 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced
4 eggs, lightly beaten

Soak the noodles then drain. Cook the noodles in a saucepan of boiling water until tender, then drain. Spread the noodles on a large dish or tray. Pour 2 tablespoons of the oil over the top and toss gently to coat – this stops the noodles sticking to each other.

Soak the mushrooms in hot water for 20–30 minutes, then drain, cut off and discard the stems and thinly slice the caps.

Heat the remaining oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook until soft. Add the chicken meat, liver and gizzard and stir-fry until lightly brown on all sides, then add the soy sauce, cover, and simmer gently until the meat is tender. Add the cabbages, celery, mushroom and spring onion and continue to stir-fry until the vegetables are tender. Remove from the wok and set aside.

Put the noodles in the wok and toss gently for 3 minutes, then remove. In the same wok, scramble the egg, adding a little oil if necessary. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. When ready to serve, spread the noodles in a serving dish, then cover with the meat and vegetables. Garnish with the scrambled egg. Serve hot or cold.

Kyazangyi Kaukswe
Large rice noodles with chicken curry

Serves: 6–8

1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) whole chicken
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
2 teaspoons salt
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) fish sauce
375 ml (12½ fl oz/1½ cups) thick coconut milk
3 large onions, thinly sliced
3 garlic cloves, crushed
55 g (2 oz/½ cup) besan (chickpea flour)
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) thin coconut milk
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) dried rice noodles or
1 kg (2 lb 3 oz) fresh rice noodles
2 teaspoons chilli oil
4 hard-boiled eggs, sliced

Joint the chicken into portions.

Put the chicken portions into a saucepan with the turmeric, salt, fish sauce and just enough water to almost cover. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer until the chicken is tender. Allow to cool, then strain, reserving the stock. Discard the skin and bones and finely shred the meat.

Put the thick coconut milk into a large saucepan over medium heat and stir constantly until it becomes thick and the oil rises to the top. Add half of the onion and all the garlic and cook, stirring constantly, until they start to colour. Add the chicken and stir constantly, for a few minutes. Set aside.

Mix the besan with just enough cold water to form a thin cream. Add the thin coconut milk to a separate saucepan and when it comes to a boil, stir in the besan mixture. Cook and stir constantly until it thickens, taking care it

does not become lumpy or stick to the pan. Gradually add the strained chicken stock until the gravy is as thick as a stew. Add the chicken and onion mixture.

If fresh rice noodles are bought as large sheets, cut them into narrow strips and soak in boiling water to heat through. If using dried noodles, cook them in a saucepan of boiling water until tender. Drain well and place in a serving bowl.

Bring the chicken combination to simmering point, stir in the chilli oil, then remove from the heat and serve immediately with the noodles, egg and remaining onion served separately.

Kyetha Hin
Chicken curry with gravy

Serves: 4–6

1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) whole chicken
2 onions. roughly chopped
1 garlic clove
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
1 stem lemongrass, white part only, sliced, or 2 strips lemon zest
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
2 teaspoons salt, or to taste
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon chilli powder (optional)
1 large ripe tomato, chopped
2 large potatoes, peeled and cubed or 250 g (9 oz/2 cups) cauliflower florets
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 tablespoon lemon juice
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

Joint the chicken into portions.

Put the onion into a food processor with the garlic, ginger and lemongrass and process to a paste, adding 1 teaspoon of the vegetable oil to make it smooth if needed.

Heat the remaining oil in a large saucepan over low heat. Add the onion mixture with the salt, turmeric and chilli powder, if using, and stir-fry over medium heat, adding a few drops of water if the mixture starts to stick to the pan. Simmer over low heat until the moisture evaporates and the ingredients turn a rich red-brown colour. Add the chicken pieces, turning to coat, then cover and simmer for 15–25 minutes. Add 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) water, the tomato, potato, fish sauce and lemon juice and continue

cooking for a further 20 minutes, or until the potato is cooked through, stirring occasionally. If using cauliflower, add it when the chicken is nearly done. Add the cardamom and coriander leaves, stir quickly and replace the lid for a few seconds to hold in the aroma. Serve with white rice and other accompaniments.

Kyetha See Byan
Chicken curry without gravy

Serves: 4–6

1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz) whole chicken
2 onions, chopped
1 garlic clove, chopped
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
1 stem lemongrass, white part only, sliced, or 2 strips lemon zest
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1½ teaspoons salt, or to taste
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
½ teaspoon chilli powder (optional)
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves

Joint the chicken into portions.

Put the onion into a food processor with the garlic, ginger and lemongrass and process to a paste, adding 1 teaspoon of the vegetable oil to make it smooth if needed.

Heat the remaining oil in a large saucepan over low heat. Add the onion mixture with the salt, turmeric and chilli powder, if using, and stir-fry over medium heat, adding a few drops of water if the mixture starts to stick to the pan. Simmer over low heat until the moisture evaporates and the ingredients turn a rich red-brown colour. At this stage they will begin to stick to the pan so keep stirring, and add the chicken pieces, turning them well in the mixture so that they are well coated. Cover and simmer for 35–45 minutes, or until the chicken is tender, stirring towards the end of cooking time to prevent sticking. The juices from the chicken will provide sufficient liquid for this curry, so do not add water or other liquid. Add the cardamom and coriander leaves, stir quickly and replace the lid for a few

seconds to hold in the aroma. Serve with white rice and other accompaniments.

Ame Hnat
Very dry beef curry

Serves: 4–6

2 large onions
5 large garlic cloves
2 teaspoons finely grated fresh ginger
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon chilli powder
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) light sesame oil or corn oil
750 g (1 lb 11 oz) stewing steak, cut into 5 cm (2 in) cubes
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 stems lemongrass, white part only, sliced, or 4 strips lemon zest
1½ teaspoons salt
2 large onions, extra, thinly sliced and deep-fried until crisp

Put the onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric and chilli powder into a food processor and process to a purée.

Heat the sesame oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan and cook the onion mixture over low heat for 20 minutes, or until the oil returns and the mixture starts to stick to the pan. Add the beef, pepper and lemongrass and continue cooking slowly, until all the juices from the beef have completely evaporated and the meat is brown. Add 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) hot water and the salt, cover, and simmer until the meat is tender, adding more water if necessary. Remove the lid, increase the heat and cook rapidly until the meat is oily-dry and well coated.

Garnish with the fried onions and serve with white rice and accompaniments.

Ametha Net Aloo Hin
Beef and potato curry

Serves: 4–6
2 large onions, chopped
5 large garlic cloves, chopped
2 teaspoons finely grated fresh ginger
1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon chilli powder
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) light sesame oil or corn oil
½ teaspoon ground cumin
½ teaspoon ground coriander
750 g (1 lb 11 oz) stewing steak, cut into 5 cm (2 in) cubes
1½ teaspoons salt, or to taste
375 g (13 oz) potatoes, peeled and quartered

Put the onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric and chilli powder into a food processor and process to a purée.

Heat the sesame oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan and cook the onion mixture over low heat for 20 minutes, or until the oil returns and the mixture starts to stick to the pan. Add the cumin and coriander, then add the beef and cook stirring for a few minutes to brown on all sides. Add the salt, potato and 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) water and simmer until the meat is tender and the potato is cooked.

Note

You can rub the cumin, coriander and salt into the beef before cooking if you prefer.

Alternative

You can also make a beef and pumpkin (winter squash) curry (amétha net shwephayone thee hin). Simply replace the potato with pumpkin and omit

the cumin and coriander – you will only need to use 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) water to cook until the pumpkin is soft. In place of pumpkin the following vegetables can be used: tomatoes, green beans, eggplant (aubergine), peas, split peas, okra, cauliflower, kohlrabi, butterbeans, broad (fava) beans, daikon (white radish).

Wethani Kyet
Fried pork curry

You may take one look at the ingredients of this recipe and feel sure there's been a mistake in the amount of garlic and ginger, but this isn't so. This favourite Burmese preparation has the most delicious flavour, and is supposed to be a way of preserving pork for months without refrigeration. In our house, however, it's eaten so quickly I haven't been able to test the theory.

Serves: 8–10

4 onions, roughly chopped
20 garlic cloves
200 g (7 oz/1 cup) chopped fresh ginger
2 kg (4 lb 6 oz) pork neck or leg, skin and bones removed, meat cut into 2.5 cm (1 in) cubes
2 teaspoons salt
2 tablespoons vinegar
1–2 teaspoons chilli powder
190 ml (6½ fl oz/¾ cup) peanut oil
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) sesame oil
1 teaspoon ground turmeric

Put the onion, garlic and ginger into a food processor and process until well combined. Turn out into a sieve set over a bowl and push with the back of a spoon to extract as much liquid as possible, reserving the solids. Pour this liquid into a large saucepan, add the pork, salt, vinegar, chilli powder and half of the peanut oil and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 1–1½ hours, or until the pork is almost tender. Remove from the heat.

Heat the remaining peanut oil and sesame oil in a large heavy-based frying pan over low heat. Add the reserved onion solids and turmeric and stir-fry

until the oil returns and the mixture starts to stick to the pan, about 25 minutes. I find I need to add a tablespoon of water from time to time and to stir frequently to prevent sticking. Halfway through cooking the onion mixture, spoon off some of the oil that has risen to the top of the pork mixture and add it to the onions.

When the mixture is a reddish-brown, add the pork ingredients from the first pan and continue cooking until the oil separates again and the liquid is almost evaporated, stirring frequently. Serve with white rice and accompaniments.

Wetha See Byan
Dry pork curry

Serves: 4

2 teaspoons tamarind pulp
1 large onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, chopped
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
½ teaspoon chilli powder
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) light sesame oil or corn oil
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) pork belly, trimmed and cut into 5 cm (2 in) cubes
1 stem lemongrass, white part only, sliced, or 2 strips lemon zest
1 tablespoon fish sauce

Soak the tamarind pulp in 60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) hot water for 10 minutes. Squeeze to dissolve the pulp in the water, then strain, discarding the seeds and fibre. Measure 2 tablespoons of the liquid and set aside.

Put the onion, garlic, ginger, turmeric and chilli powder into a food processor and process to a purée.

Heat the sesame oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan and cook the onion mixture over low heat for 20 minutes, or until the oil returns and the mixture starts to stick to the pan. Add the pork and simmer gently in its own juices until tender. Add the lemongrass, tamarind liquid and fish sauce and stir well, then continue cooking until all the water has evaporated and the oil separates from the sauce. Serve hot.

Note

The flavour of the curry can be varied by adding extra chilli powder for a hot curry, or stirring in a piece of hot Indian mango pickle. Slices of lemon,

chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves or chopped spring onions (scallions) can be added at the end of cooking, if desired.

Sides and Accompaniments

Thanatsone
Mixed vegetable salad

Serves: 6

300 g (10½ oz/3 cups) mixed sliced vegetables
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) vegetable oil
1 tablespoon sesame oil
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
2 large onions, thinly sliced
4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon lightly toasted sesame seeds
2 tablespoons white vinegar

Blanch the vegetables in a saucepan of salted boiling water for 1–2 minutes, or until just tender but still crisp. Refresh immediately in cold water to prevent overcooking, then drain well.

Heat the vegetable and sesame oils in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the turmeric, onion and garlic and stir-fry until the onion and garlic start to brown. Remove the pan from the heat and continue stirring until they are brown and crisp. When cool, pour a little of the oil over the vegetables, add the onion and garlic and toss lightly to combine, adding salt and vinegar to taste. Sprinkle over the toasted sesame seeds and serve with rice and curry.

Hmo Kyaw Kyet
Mushrooms fried with chicken

Serves: 6

60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) oil
1 large onion, thinly sliced
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) boneless skinless chicken breasts or thighs, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
500 g (1 lb 2 oz) fresh mushrooms, halved if large

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook until golden brown. Add the chicken and stir-fry for 2 minutes, over high heat, then reduce the heat to medium, cover, and cook for 3 minutes. Add the soy sauce and season with salt to taste, then add the mushrooms, re-cover, and simmer for 3–4 minutes. Increase the heat and cook uncovered until most of the liquid has evaporated. Serve hot with rice.

Akyaw
Stir-fried vegetables

Choose any of the following vegetables for this simple stir-fry and make sure they are thinly sliced or any leaves are shredded: okra, eggplant (aubergine), marrow (summer squash), zucchini (courgette), green beans, snow peas (mangetout), carrot, cucumber, cabbage, English spinach, bean sprouts or bamboo shoots.

Serves: 6

2 teaspoons sesame oil or corn oil
1–2 onions, thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
300–400 g (10½ –14 oz/3–4 cups) mixed sliced vegetables
fish sauce (optional)

Heat the sesame oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook until the onion is soft. Add the vegetables and stir-fry until they are tender but still crisp. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper, and a sprinkling of fish sauce to taste. Serve immediately.

Nga Chauk
Salt fish

Flat bony salt fish is usually used in hin gha soups or sour curries. Thick fleshy salt fish is cut in cubes and either fried or toasted and served with plain boiled rice and Hin cho and other mild dishes.

Ngapi Chet
Shrimp paste sauté

Makes: 2 cups

1 teaspoon tamarind pulp
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) vegetable oil
1 onion, chopped
6 garlic cloves, chopped
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
1 tablespoon dried shrimp paste
3–4 tomatoes, quartered
100 g (3½ oz/1 cup) dried prawn (shrimp) powder
2 fresh green chillies, deseeded and sliced
½ teaspoon salt, or to taste

Soak the tamarind pulp in 1 tablespoon hot water for 10 minutes. Squeeze to dissolve the pulp in the water, then strain, discarding the seeds and fibre. Set aside.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic and turmeric and stirfry until dark golden and nearly sticking to the pan. Add the dried shrimp paste, tomato, dried prawn powder, chilli and tamarind liquid and simmer until all the liquid has evaporated and the oil starts to separate. Season with salt to taste.

Ngapi Htaung
Pounded prawn paste

This prawn paste is eaten in very small quantities with rice.

Makes: 1 cup

2 tablespoons dried shrimp paste
2 onions, roughly chopped
4 garlic cloves
2 tablespoons dried prawn (shrimp) powder
2 teaspoons chilli powder (optional)
1 teaspoon salt
juice of ½ lemon

Wrap the dried shrimp paste in a piece of foil and roast under a preheated grill (broiler) for 5 minutes, turning halfway through cooking time.

Wrap the onion and garlic in a separate piece of foil and put under the grill with the dried shrimp paste for 10 minutes, or until fragrant.

Unwrap and, when cool, use a mortar and pestle to pound with the remaining ingredients, stirring in the lemon juice until well combined.

Ngan Pya Ye Chet
Fish sauce sauté

Makes: 2 cups

1 teaspoon oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) fish sauce
1 stem lemongrass, white part only, sliced, or 2 strips lemon zest, finely chopped
6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2 spring onions (scallions), finely chopped
½ teaspoon chilli powder

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the onion and fry for a few seconds, then add the fish sauce and bring to the boil. Remove from the heat and immediately add the lemongrass, garlic, spring onion and chilli powder. Allow to cool before serving.

Pazoon Ngabaung Kyaw
Prawns fried in batter

Serves: 6

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) small raw prawns (shrimp), heads removed (there is no need to peel and devein them if they are as small as they should be)
oil for deep-frying

Batter
55 g (2 oz/½ cup) besan (chickpea flour)
75 g (2¾ oz/½ cup) self-raising flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 garlic clove, crushed
½ teaspoon finely grated fresh ginger
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric

To make the batter, put all the ingredients in a large bowl with 125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) water and stir well to combine.

Add the prawns to the batter and toss to coat. Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the prawns, in batches, until golden brown and crisp. Prevent them from sticking to each other by spooning oil over as they are added to the oil. Drain on paper towel and serve warm.

Boothi Ngabaung Kyaw
White marrow fried in batter

Serves: 6

1 quantity batter from Prawns fried in batter (above)
200–300 g (7–10½ oz/2–3 cups) peeled, deseeded and sliced marrow (summer squash)
oil for deep-frying

Make the batter following the directions above. Dip the marrow slices into the batter to coat. Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the marrow, in batches, until golden and crisp. Drain on paper towel and serve immediately. This can be accompanied by Fish sauce sauté for dipping.

Pe Thee Pin Pauk Ngabaung Kyaw
Bean sprouts fried in batter

Serves: 6

1 quantity batter from Prawns fried in batter (opposite)
240 g (8½ oz/2⅔ cups) fresh bean sprouts, trimmed
oil for deep-frying

Make the batter following the directions opposite. Fold in the bean sprouts to combine. Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based saucepan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the batter mixture in tablespoonfuls, until golden brown and crisp. Drain on paper towel and serve hot.

Tha Hnat
Cucumber pickle

Serves: 6

2 telegraph (long) cucumbers, peeled, halved and deseeded
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) malt vinegar
1 teaspoon salt
60 ml (2 fl oz/¼ cup) peanut oil
2 tablespoons sesame oil
8 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 onion, thinly sliced or 2 tablespoons fried shallots
2 tablespoons lightly toasted sesame seeds

Cut the cucumbers into thick strips, then cut the strips into 5 cm (2 in) lengths.

Put the vinegar, salt and 500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) water in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Add the cucumber and boil just until they look translucent – do not overcook. Drain immediately and leave to cool.

Heat the peanut and sesame oils in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook until pale golden. Remove to a plate. Add the onion and cook until golden. Remove to a plate. When the oil in the pan is cold, dress the cucumbers with 3 tablespoons of the oil, mixing well with the fingers. Put into a small serving dish, add the onion, garlic and sesame seeds, and toss lightly to combine.

Wetha, Nga, Pazoon Lone Kyaw
Fried pork, fish or prawn balls

Makes: about 30

500 g (1 lb 2 oz) lean pork meat or skinless, boneless fish fillets or raw prawns (shrimp), peeled and deveined
1–2 onions, finely chopped
1 fresh green chilli, deseeded and finely chopped
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
1 tablespoon chopped fresh coriander (cilantro) leaves, finely chopped
salt to taste
plain (all-purpose) flour for coating
oil for frying

Mince (grind) the pork, fish or prawns through the fine blade of a mincer (grinder). Add all the remaining ingredients, except the flour and oil, and mix well to combine. Take a tablespoonful of the mixture at a time and shape into little balls. Roll the balls in the flour to coat.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan and cook the balls, in batches, turning often, until golden.

Beyakyaw
Split pea fritters

Serves: 8

220 g (8 oz/1 cup) split peas, soaked overnight in water, then drained
2 onions, finely chopped
2 fresh red chillies, deseeded and finely chopped
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
½ teaspoon salt
oil for deep-frying
sliced onion and lemon wedges to garnish

Put the split peas in a food processor and process to a paste. Stir in all the remaining ingredients, except the oil, onion and lemon wedges. Take 1 tablespoon at a time and shape into balls. Flatten each ball to make a 1.5 cm (½ in) thick patty.

Heat the oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over medium heat. When the oil is hot, deep-fry the fritters, in batches, until golden brown. Drain on paper towel. Serve with the sliced onion and lemon wedges.

Balachaung
Oily balachaung

Balachaung is a preparation of fried dried prawns (shrimp) and is the most popular Burmese accompaniment served with rice.

Makes: 3 cups

500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) peanut oil
4 onions, thinly sliced
20 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
250 g (9 oz) dried prawn (shrimp) powder
2 teaspoons chilli powder (optional)
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon dried shrimp paste
125 ml (4 fl oz/½ cup) vinegar

Heat the peanut oil in a wok or large heavy-based frying pan over low heat. Cook the onion and garlic separately until golden. Use a slotted spoon to remove each to a plate – they will become crisp and darken as they cool.

Add the dried prawn powder to the wok and stir-fry for 5 minutes, then add the chilli powder, salt and combined dried shrimp paste and vinegar, and continue to stir-fry until crisp. Remove from the heat and allow to cool completely. Add the fried onion and garlic, stirring to combine and store in a sterilised airtight jar for up to 4 weeks.

Note

To make a dry balachaung, cook the recipe above but once both the garlic and onion have been fried, remove all but 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) of the oil from the pan. All the dried prawn powder should be moistened by the oil. If there is not enough oil, add a spoonful or two from the reserved oil. Remaining oil may be used for flavouring fried rice and other dishes.

Desserts

Moh Loung Ye Baw
Teething cake

These little dumplings cooked in coconut milk are prepared and traditionally sent to neighbours and friends, or fed to the poor, in celebration of a baby's first tooth.

Serves: 8

150 g (5½ oz/1 cup) plain (all-purpose) flour
175 g (6 oz/1 cup) rice flour
a pinch of salt
½ teaspoon bicarbonate of soda (baking soda)
1 tablespoon light sesame oil or corn oil
60 g (2 oz/1 cup) grated fresh coconut
90 g (3 oz/½ cup) grated palm sugar (jaggery)
1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) coconut milk
1 tablespoon sugar

Sift the plain and rice flours, salt and bicarbonate of soda into a bowl. Mix thoroughly, then rub in the oil. Add just enough water to make a firm paste, about 170 ml (5½ fl oz/⅓ cup). Knead well to make a smooth dough.

In a separate bowl, mix together the coconut and palm sugar. Take 1 teaspoon of dough at a time and roll into neat balls. Use your hand to flatten to a circle and put a little of the coconut and palm sugar mixture in the centre. Mould the dough together to seal and re-roll to make a perfect globe.

Put the coconut milk and sugar in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Gently lower the balls into the boiling milk and stir gently until they rise to the surface. Continue to simmer for 10 minutes after they start to float. Serve hot or cold with a little of the coconut liquid, if desired.

Moh-Let-Saung
Iced coconut milk with sago

Serves: 6

195 g (7 oz/1 cup) sago
135 g (5 oz/¾ cup) grated palm sugar (jaggery)
ice cubes
1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) coconut milk

Wash and soak the sago in 1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) water for 1 hour. Drain well, then transfer to a large saucepan with 750 ml (25½ fl oz/3 cups) fresh water. Bring to the boil and simmer over medium heat until the sago grains are clear. Cool and refrigerate to chill completely.

Put the palm sugar in a small saucepan with 250 ml (8½ fl oz/1 cup) water and heat gently until it dissolves. Cool and strain.

For each serving, put 4 tablespoons of chilled sago into a tall glass, add 3 tablespoons of the palm sugar syrup and mix well. Add ice cubes and fill up with coconut milk. Stir and serve.

Gin Thoke
Ginger mix

This after-meal digestive is eaten as a snack instead of dessert.

Serves: 8

125 g (4½ oz) very tender young ginger, peeled and thinly sliced
80–125 ml (2½–4½ fl oz/⅓–½ cup) lemon juice
2 tablespoons peanut oil
1 tablespoon sesame oil
12 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
2–3 tablespoons sesame seeds

Marinate the ginger in a bowl with the lemon juice for at least 1 hour or until the ginger turns pink.

Heat the peanut and sesame oils in a small frying pan. Add the garlic and cook until pale golden. Remove immediately and drain on paper towel. Allow to cool and crisp. Put the sesame seeds in a dry frying pan and toast until golden brown, stirring constantly. Turn onto a plate to cool. Drain the ginger and put it in a bowl. Add salt to taste, and sprinkle with the garlic and sesame seeds. Toss together lightly and serve in small bowls.

Sanwin Makin
Semolina pudding

This dish (pronounced ‘sinamakin’) is rich with coconut milk, ghee and sesame seeds. It is cut and served like a cake.

Makes: 25 pieces

125 g (4½ oz/1 cup) fine semolina
750 ml (25½ fl oz/3 cups) thick coconut milk
220 g (8 oz/1 cup) sugar
125 g (4½ oz) ghee or butter, cut into cubes
a pinch of salt
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom
3 eggs, separated
2–3 tablespoons lightly toasted sesame seeds

Preheat the oven to 160°C (320°F). Lightly grease a 22 cm (8¾ in) square cake tin or ovenproof dish.

Put the semolina in a large heavy-based saucepan. Gradually add the coconut milk, stirring often to keep the mixture free of lumps. Add the sugar, place over medium heat and bring to the boil, stirring constantly. When the mixture boils and thickens add a small amount of ghee at a time and continue cooking until the mixture becomes very thick and leaves the side of the pan. Remove from the heat, then add the salt and cardamom and mix well. Beat in the egg yolks, one at a time.

Whisk the egg whites in a clean bowl until stiff peaks form. Fold into the semolina mixture.

Turn the mixture into the prepared tin and smooth the top. Sprinkle over the sesame seeds and bake in the oven for 45–60 minutes, or until well risen and golden brown. Remove from the heat, allow to cool in the dish, then cut into large diamond-shaped pieces. Serve as a snack or dessert.

Shwe Htmin
Golden rice

Serves: 4

200 g (7 oz/1 cup) long-grain rice
1 tablespoon oil
500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) coconut milk
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
¼ teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons sugar
60 g (2 oz/1 cup) grated fresh coconut, plus extra to serve
2 tablespoons lightly toasted sesame seeds, plus extra to serve

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F). Wash the rice well and drain in a colander for 30 minutes.

Heat the oil in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the rice and stir constantly for 3 minutes to coat in the oil. Add the coconut milk, turmeric, salt and sugar and bring to the boil for about 2 minutes, or until the liquid looks thick. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook for 15 minutes, or until all the liquid has been absorbed. Remove from the heat and while still hot, fluff up with a fork and mix in the coconut.

Transfer the rice to a greased ovenproof dish and smooth the top, pressing down firmly. Sprinkle with the sesame seeds and bake in the oven for 20 minutes. Remove from the heat, cut into diamond shapes and serve with more grated fresh coconut and toasted sesame seeds, which have been slightly crushed and mixed with a little salt.

Kyauk Kyaw (1)
Iced jelly drink

Agar-agar or seaweed jelly also gives its name to a drink served in Burma that is so popular it is sold on every street corner.

palm sugar (jaggery) or slab sugar
rose concentrate
540 g (1 lb 3 oz) grass jelly (glossary), thinly sliced
iced water
crushed ice

Make a syrup from the sugar and water. Allow to cool, then add the rose concentrate to flavour. Put a tablespoon of the grass jelly into each glass. Add a couple of spoonfuls of the syrup, then fill up with iced water and crushed ice. Stir well and serve. Another version of this uses coconut milk instead of water, and is also delicious and cooling on a hot day.

Note

Chopped agar-agar jelly can be used in place of tinned grass jelly if preferred.

Ngapyaw Kyaw
Banana snacks

Long green bananas, short yellow bananas, three-cornered bananas, large red bananas, small sour bananas, sweet and butter-smooth bananas – they all grow in Burma and are available all year round.

Sweet, delicately flavoured varieties are eaten as they are, but others are the starting point for all sorts of sweet snacks. They can be sliced, rolled in flour and fried; boiled in coconut milk; mashed with egg and a little plain (all-purpose) flour to make a thick batter and shallow fried. These snacks are often served with a syrup made from palm sugar (jaggery).

Kyauk Kyaw (2)
Seaweed jelly

This jelly is made from translucent strands of refined seaweed that look like crinkled strips of cellophane. It is sold in Asian grocery stores as refined agar-agar. Agar-agar powder is also sold in packets at Asian grocery stores. The name of the recipe is pronounced ‘chow-chaw’.

Makes: about 18 pieces

7 g (¼ oz) agar-agar strands or 1 tablespoon agar-agar powder
1 litre (34 fl oz/4 cups) coconut milk
110 g (4 oz/½ cup) sugar
a few drops of rose flavouring or 1 tablespoon rosewater

Soak the strands of agar-agar in cold water for at least 1 hour, or preferably overnight. Drain and measure out 1½ cups loosely packed strands. Put the strands and coconut milk into a saucepan and bring to the boil, stirring constantly. Add the sugar and simmer for 15–20 minutes, stirring often, until all the strands are completely dissolved. Remove from the heat.

Alternatively if you are using agar-agar powder, sprinkle on top of the milk and bring to the boil, then simmer and stir for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat.

Add the rose flavouring to the jelly, to taste, then pour into a 1.5 litre (51 fl oz/6 cup) capacity dish rinsed out with cold water, and allow to set. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Cut into squares or diamonds. This is a very firm jelly and can be picked up and eaten with your fingers.

Note

In some instances, making your own coconut milk gives a much more authentic and lighter result. This dessert is one of them.

Glossary and Index

Agar-Agar

A setting agent obtained from seaweed, agar-agar is widely used in Asia, as it sets without refrigeration. It is sold in sachets in powder form and is available from Asian grocery stores and health food stores. It is also sold in strands, though they are less obtainable and slower to dissolve. Also known as: *kyauk kyaw* (Burma), *dai choy goh* (China), *kanten* (Japan), *gulaman* (Philippines), *chun chow* (Sri Lanka), *woon* (Thailand), *rau cau* (Vietnam).

Aromatic Ginger

See galangal, lesser.

Bamboo shoots

Sold in tins and jars, either water-packed, pickled or braised. Unless otherwise stated, the recipes in this book use the water-packed variety. If using the tinned variety, store left-over bamboo shoots in a bowl of fresh water in the refrigerator, changing the water daily for up to 10 days. Winter bamboo shoots are much smaller and more tender, and are called for in certain recipes. However, if they are not available, use the larger variety. Also known as: *wah-bho-khmyit* (Burma), *tumpeang* (Cambodia), *suehn* (China), *rebung* (Indonesia), *takenoko* (Japan), *rebong* (Malaysia), *labong* (Philippines), *normai* (Thailand), *mang* (Vietnam).

Bean sprouts

Green mung beans are traditionally used for bean sprouts. They are sold fresh in most large supermarkets, Asian grocery stores and health food stores. Chinese stores sell longer shoots than those available from supermarkets, which are usually just starting to sprout. Substitute thinly sliced celery for a similar texture but different flavour. Very fresh bean sprouts can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 4 days in a plastic bag; alternatively, cover with water and change the water daily. Before using, rinse the sprouts, drain well and trim off the brown tails. Also known as: *pepinauk* (Burma), *nga choi* (China), *taoge* (Indonesia), *moyashi* (Japan), *suk ju* (Korea), *taugeh* (Malaysia and Singapore), *tau ngork* (Thailand), *gia* (Vietnam).

Besan (chickpea flour)

Available at most large supermarkets and Asian grocery stores. Pea flour from health food stores can be substituted, but if it is coarse, pass it through a fine sieve before using. Alternatively, roast yellow split peas in a heavy-based frying pan, stirring constantly and taking care not to burn them. Cool, then process in a food processor or pound using a mortar and pestle, sift, then store the fine flour in an airtight container. Besan has a distinctive taste, and ordinary wheat flour cannot be substituted.

Cardamom

Botanical name: *Elettaria cardamomum*

Next to saffron, cardamom is the world's most expensive spice. Cardamoms grow mainly in India and Sri Lanka, and are the seed pods of a member of the ginger family. The dried seed pods are either pale green or brown, according to variety; sometimes they are bleached white. They are added, either whole or bruised, to pilaus and other rice dishes, spiced curries and other preparations or sweets. When ground cardamom is called for, the seed pods are opened and discarded and only the small black or brown seeds are ground. For full flavour, it is best to grind them just before using. If you cannot buy a high-quality ground cardamom, crush the seeds using a mortar and pestle or spice mill, as required. Also known as: *phalazee* (Burma), *illaichi* (India), *kapulaga* (Indonesia), *buah pelaga* (Malaysia), *enasal* (Sri Lanka), *kravan* (Thailand).

Cellophane (bean thread) noodles

These are fine, translucent noodles made from the starch of green mung beans. The noodles may be soaked in hot water before use, or may require boiling according to the texture required. They can also be deep-fried straight from the packet, generally when used as a garnish or to provide a background for other foods. Also known as: *kyazan* (Burma), *mee sooer* (Cambodia), *bi fun, ning fun, sai fun, fun see* (China), *sotanghoon* (Indonesia), *harusame* (Japan), *sohoon, tunghoon* (Malaysia), *sotanghon* (Philippines), *woon sen* (Thailand), *búng u, mien* (Vietnam).

Chilli Powder

Asian chilli powder is made from ground chillies. It is much hotter than the Mexican-style chilli powder, which is mostly ground cumin. You may be able to find ground Kashmiri chillies, which are a brighter red colour and not as hot as other ground chillies.

Chillies, Bird's Eye

Very small, very hot chillies. Used mainly in pickles, though in some cases added to food when a very hot flavour is required (as in Thai food). Treat with caution and wear disposable gloves when handling seeds. As with all chillies, the seeds and membrane contain the highest concentration of volatile oil. Also known as: *cili padi* (Malaysia), *siling labuyo* (Philippines), *kochchi miris* (Sri Lanka), *prik kee noo suan* (Thailand).

Chillies, green and red

Botanical name: *Capsicum* spp.

Chillies mature from green to red, becoming hotter as they mature. Both varieties are used fresh for flavouring, either whole or finely chopped, sliced as a garnish or ground into sambals. The seeds, which are the hottest parts, are usually (though not always) removed. Larger varieties tend to be milder than the small varieties. See Chillie for handling. Dried red chillies are found in packets in Asian grocery stores – the medium- to large-sized chillies are best for most recipes in this book.

Cinnamon

Botanical name: *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* and *verum*

True cinnamon is native to Sri Lanka. Buy cinnamon sticks or quills rather than the ground spice, which loses its flavour when stored too long. It is used in both sweet and savoury dishes. Cassia, which is grown in India, Indonesia and Burma, is similar. It is much stronger in flavour, and is cheaper, but it lacks the delicacy of cinnamon. The leaves and buds of the cassia tree have a flavour similar to the bark and are also used for flavouring food. For sweet dishes, use true cinnamon. Cassia bark is much thicker because the corky layer is left on. Also known as: *thit-ja-boh-guak* (Burma), *darchini* (India), *kayu manis* (Malaysia and Indonesia), *kurundu* (Sri Lanka), *op chery* (Thailand), *que* (Vietnam).

Cloves

Botanical name: *Syzygium aromaticum, Eugenia aromatica* and *E. caryophyllus*

Cloves are the dried flower buds of an evergreen tropical tree native to Southeast Asia. They were used in China more than 2000 years ago, and were also used by the Romans. Oil of cloves contains phenol, a powerful antiseptic that discourages putrefaction, and the clove is hence one of the spices that helps preserve food. Also known as: *ley-nyin-bwint* (Burma), *laung* (India), *cengkeh* (Indonesia), *bunga cingkeh* (Malaysia), *karabu* (Sri Lanka), *kaan ploo* (Thailand).

Coconut milk

This is not the water inside the nut, as is commonly believed, but the creamy liquid extracted from the grated flesh of fresh coconuts or from desiccated or shredded coconut (Coconut milk). When coconut milk is called for, especially in sweet dishes, do make an effort to use it, for its flavour cannot be duplicated by using any other kind of milk. Tinned and Tetra Pak coconut milk saves time and effort, although be warned that some brands are far better than others so try a few until you find one that appeals. Low-fat coconut milk is an unappealing substitute.

Coriander (cilantro)

Botanical name: *Coriandrum sativum*

All parts of the coriander (cilantro) plant are used in Asian cooking. The dried seed is the main ingredient in curry powder, and although not hot it has a fragrance that makes it an essential part of a curry blend. The fresh coriander herb is also known as cilantro or Chinese parsley in other parts of the world. It is indispensable in Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, India and China where it is also called 'fragrant green'. Also known as: *nannamzee* (seed), *nannambin* (leaves) (Burma), *chee van soy* (Cambodia), *yuen sai* (China), *dhania* (seed), *dhania pattar, dhania sabz* (leaves) (India), *phak hom pom* (Laos), *ketumbar* (seeds), *daun ketumbar* (leaves) (Malaysia), *kinchay* (Philippines), *kottamalli* (seed), *kottamalli kolle* (leaves) (Sri Lanka), *pak chee* (Thailand), *ngò, rau mùi* (Vietnam).

Cumin

Botanical name: Cuminum cyminum

Cumin is, with coriander, the most essential ingredient in prepared curry powders. It is available as seed, or ground. There may be some confusion between cumin and caraway seeds because they are similar in appearance, but the flavours are completely different and one cannot replace the other in recipes. Also known as: *ma-ch'in* (China), *sufaid zeera* (white cumin), *zeera, jeera* (India), *jinten* (Indonesia), *kumin* (Japan), *jintan puteh* (Malaysia), *sududurru* (Sri Lanka), *yira* (Thailand).

Daun salam

An aromatic leaf used in Indonesian cooking, it is larger than the curry leaf used in India and Sri Lanka, but has a slightly cinnamon flavour. There is no substitute.

Dried shrimp paste

Commercially sold as *blacan, blachan* or *belacan*, this is a pungent paste made from prawns (shrimp), and used in many Southeast Asian recipes. It is sold in tins, flat slabs or blocks and will keep indefinitely. If stored in an airtight jar it will, like a genie in a bottle, perform its magic when required without obtruding on the kitchen at other times! It does not need refrigeration. Also known as: *ngapi* (Burma), *trasi* (Indonesia), *blacan* (Malaysia), *kapi* (Thailand), *mam tom* (Vietnam).

Fennel

Botanical name: *Foeniculum vulgare*

Sometimes known as 'sweet cumin' or 'large cumin', because of its similar-shaped seeds, it is a member of the same botanical family and is used in Sri Lankan curries (but in much smaller quantities than true cumin). It is available in ground or seed form. Substitute an equal amount of aniseed. Also known as: *samouk-saba* (Burma), *sonf* (India), *adas* (Indonesia), *jintan manis* (Malaysia), *maduru* (Sri Lanka), *yira* (Thailand).

Fish cakes

Both Chinese-style fish cakes and Japanese-style fish cakes are sold ready to use in most Asian grocery stores. They can be kept for a few days if refrigerated, and need no further cooking apart from heating through.

Fish sauce

A thin, salty, brown sauce used in Southeast Asian cooking to bring out the flavour in other foods. A small variety of fish is packed in wooden barrels with salt, and the liquid that runs off is the 'fish sauce'. There are different grades of fish sauce, the Vietnamese version being darker and having a more pronounced fish flavour than the others. Also known as: *ngan-pya-ye* (Burma), *tuck trey* (Cambodia), *nam pa* (Laos), *patis* (Philippines), *nam pla* (Thailand), *nuoc nam* (Vietnam).

Galangal, greater

Botanical name: *Alpinia galanga*

A rhizome, like ginger, galangal has thin brown skin and the flesh is creamy white. As it ages, galangal becomes woody and can be very tough to cut and difficult to grind. Scrape off the skin and chop the root finely before pounding or grinding in spice pastes. Slices may be simmered in soups and curries for extra flavour. The young rhizome is most attractive with smooth skin blushing pink. The greater galangal is more extensively used in Southeast Asian cooking than lesser galangal, and is more delicate in flavour, although if absent from a dish it will be missed. Also known as: *pa-de-gaw-gyi* (Burma), *romdaeng* (Cambodia), *gao liang jiang, lam kieu, lam keong* (China), *kulanjan, kosht-kulinjan, pera-rattai* (India), *laos* (Indonesia), *lengkuas* (Malaysia), *kha* (Thailand and Laos), *riêng* (Vietnam). *See also galangal, lesser (aromatic ginger)*.

Galangal, lesser (aromatic ginger)

Botanical name: *Kaempferia pandurata, Alpinia officinarum*

Also known as 'aromatic ginger', this member of the ginger family cannot be used as a substitute for ginger or vice versa. It is used only in certain dishes and gives a pronounced aromatic flavour. When available fresh, it is sliced or pounded to a pulp; but outside of Asia it is usually sold dried, and the hard round slices must be pounded using a mortar and pestle or

pulverised in a food processor before use. In some spice ranges it is sold in powdered form as kencur powder. The plant is native to southern China and has been used for centuries in medicinal herbal mixtures, but it is not used in Chinese cooking. Also known as: *sa leung geung, sha geung fun* (China), *kencur* (Indonesia), *zeodary* or *kencur* (Malaysia), *ingurupiyali* (Sri Lanka), *krachai* (Thailand).

Ghee (clarified butter)

Sold in tins, ghee is pure butterfat without any of the milk solids. It can be heated to much higher temperatures than butter without burning, and imparts a distinctive flavour when used as a cooking medium. See for details on making ghee.

Ginger

Botanical name: *Zingiber officinale*

A rhizome with a robust flavour and a warming quality, it is essential in most Asian dishes. Fresh ginger root should be used; powdered ginger cannot be substituted for fresh ginger, for the flavour is quite different. To prepare for use, scrape off the skin with a sharp knife and either grate or chop finely (according to recipe requirements) before measuring. To preserve fresh ginger for long periods of time, place in a freezer bag and store in the freezer – it is a simple matter to peel and grate in the frozen state. Also known as: *gin* (Burma), *khnyahee* (Cambodia), *jeung* (China), *adrak* (India), *jahe* (Indonesia), *shoga* (Japan), *halia* (Malaysia), *luya* (Philippines), *inguru* (Sri Lanka), *khing* (Thailand), *gung* (Vietnam).

Glutinous rice

Botanical name: *Oryza sativa* var. *glutinosa* and *glutinosa*

Although also known as sticky rice, because of its sticky consistency, it actually contains no gluten. Cooked both as whole grains, milled and unmilled (with bran removed or intact), as well as ground into flour. The purple and black varieties are different strains. Mostly used to make sweets except in Laos, where it is eaten in place of ordinary rice. Also known as: *kao hnyin* (Burma), *bai dow map* (Cambodia), *nuomi* (China), *ketan*

(Indonesia), *mochigome* (Japan), *chapssal* (Korea), *khao niao* (Laos and Thailand), *pulot* (Malaysia), *malagkit* (Philippines), *go np* (Vietnam).

Grass jelly

Sold in tins in Asian grocery stores, this black jelly made with seaweed is used exclusively in sweet drinks throughout Burma, Malaysia, Singapore and China. It tastes and smells faintly of iodine, reassuring proof of how good it is to eat, as those who use it believe. Also known as: *leung fun* (China).

Ground rice

See rice, ground

Hijiki

Botanical name: *Cystophyllum fusiforme*

A type of seaweed used as a vegetable by the Japanese. In its dried state it looks like coarse black wire. It must be soaked before cooking.

Jicama

See yam bean.

Kaffir lime

See makrut.

Kencur (aromatic ginger) powder

See Galangal, lesser (aromatic ginger).

Laos (dried galangal) powder

Botanical name: *Alpinia galanga*

A very delicate spice, sold in powder form, *laos* is the ground, dried root of the 'greater galangal'. The fresh or bottled rhizome will have more impact, but the ground spice can add an intriguing note to curries and dishes requiring longer cooking. *See galangal, greater*.

Lemongrass

Botanical name: *Cymbopogon citratus*
This aromatic Asian plant is a tall grass with sharp-edged leaves that multiply into clumps. The whitish, slightly bulbous base is used to impart a lemony flavour to curries, salads and soups. Cut just one stem with a sharp knife, close to the root, and use about 10–12 cm (4–4¾ in) of the stalk from the base, discarding the leaves. If you have to use dried lemongrass, about 12 strips dried are equal to 1 fresh stem; although 2–3 strips of very thinly peeled lemon zest will do just as well. Dried ground lemongrass is known as sereh powder in Indonesia. Also known as: *zabalin* (Burma), *kreung, bai mak nao* (Cambodia), *heung masu tso* (China), *sera* (India and Sri Lanka), *sereh* (Indonesia), *remon-sou* (Japan), *serai* (Malaysia), *takrai* (Thailand), *xa* (Vietnam).

Lily buds (golden needles)

Botanical name: *Hemerocallis*
Also known as 'lotus buds', these long, narrow, dried golden buds have a very delicate flavour and are said to be nutritious. Before using, soak for 30 minutes or longer in hot water, then cut in half widthways or tie in a knot for more elegant eating. Also known as: *khim chiam* (China), *kanzou* (Japan), *pet kup julgi* (Korea), *dole mai chin* (Thailand), *kim cham* (Vietnam).

Lotus root

Botanical name: *Nelumbo nucifera*
The edible rhizome of the graceful, ancient flowering water plant. Sometimes available fresh; peel, cut into slices and use as directed. Dried lotus root must be soaked for at least 20 minutes in hot water with a little lemon juice added to preserve whiteness. Peeled and sliced frozen lotus root is widely available. Tinned lotus root can be stored in the refrigerator for a few days after being opened. The seeds of the spent flower, peeled and eaten raw as a snack in Asia, are mild-tasting with a subtle crunch. The dried seeds, sometimes known as 'lotus nuts', must be boiled until soft. They are crystallised with sugar as part of Chinese New Year sweet offerings, cooked into a sweet soup, and made into sweetened lotus nut paste, which is mostly sold in tins and used as a filling for Chinese moon

cakes. Also known as: *lien ngow, ngau* (China), *kamal-kakri* (India), *teratai* (Indonesia), *renkon* (Japan), *seroja* (Malaysia), *baino* (Philippines), *nelun-ala* (Sri Lanka), *bua-luang* (Thailand).

Mace

Botanical name: *Myristica fragrans*

Mace is part of the nutmeg, a fruit that looks like an apricot and grows on tall tropical trees. When ripe, the fruit splits to reveal the aril, lacy and bright scarlet, surrounding the shell of the seed; the dried aril is mace and the kernel is nutmeg. Mace has a flavour similar to nutmeg but more delicate, and it is sometimes used in meat or fish curries, especially in Sri Lanka, although its main use in Asia is medicinal (a few blades of mace steeped in hot water, the water then being taken to combat nausea and diarrhoea). Also known as: *javatri* (India), *wasa-vasi* (Sri Lanka).

Makrut (kaffir lime)

Botanical name: *Citrus hystrix, C. papedia, C. amblycarpa*

The leaves of this citrus are prized for their flavour and are encountered in the cuisines of Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. The double-lobed leaf, when young and shredded into hair-fine strands, adds a vibrant quality to salads or sprinkled over a cooked dish just before eating. The older, tougher leaves are simmered in curries and soups for their lively citrus flavour. The bumpy, green-skinned fruit may also be an ingredient in curry pastes and the juice used in dressings. Also known as: *shauk-mu, shauk-waing* (Burma), *slok krauch* (Cambodia), *fatt-fung-kam* (China), *jeruk purut, jeruk sambal* (Indonesia), *limau purut* (Malaysia), *swangi* (Philippines), *makrut* (Thailand), *kaffir vôi* (Vietnam).

Mint

Botanical name: *Mentha piperita* Although there are many varieties,

Although there are many varieties, the common, round-leafed mint is the one most often used in cooking. It adds flavour to many dishes, and fresh mint chutney is an essential accompaniment to an Indian biriani meal or as a dipping sauce for samoosa. Mint is also used in Laotian fish dishes as well as Thai, Cambodian and Vietnamese salads. Also known as: *chee ongkaam*

(Cambodia), *podina* (India), *pak hom ho* (Laos), *daun pudina* (Malaysia), *meenchi (Sri Lanka), hung cay* (Vietnam).

Mung bean flour

Extremely fine, smooth flour made from mung beans, it is available either white or coloured a delicate pink or green, and is used in the making of sweets. When mixed with water and brought to the boil it becomes clear and thick like arrowroot or cornflour (cornstarch) (both of which are suitable substitutes). Also known as: *lue dau fen* (China), *tepung hoen kwe* (Indonesia and Malaysia), *pang tua* (Thailand), *bot dau xanh* (Vietnam).

Mushrooms, shiitake (dried)

Botanical name: *Lentinus edodes*

Also known as 'fragrant mushrooms', the flavour of these mushrooms is quite individual. They are expensive but give an incomparable flavour. Soak for 20–30 minutes before using. The stems are usually discarded and only the caps used. There is no substitute. Also known as: *hmo chauk* (Burma), *doong gwoo, leong goo* (China), *cindauwan* (Malaysia), *kabuteng shiitakena pinatuyo* (Philippines), *hed hom* (Thailand), *khô nm shiitake, nm ro'm khô* (Vietnam).

Mustard cabbage (gai choy)

Botanical name: *Brassica juncea*

Mustard cabbage (gai choy), or Sichuan vegetable, is often preserved in brine, with chilli added. It can be used as a relish, or included in dishes requiring piquancy and tang. Sold in tins. Also known as: *dai gai choy, jook gai choy* (China), *sarson* (India), *sawi hijau* (Indonesia), *takana, karashi-na* (Japan), *mustasa* (Philippines), *abba kolle* (Sri Lanka), *phakkat khieo* (Thailand), *rau cai* (Vietnam).

Oyster sauce

Adds delicate flavour to all kinds of dishes. Made from oysters cooked in soy sauce and brine, this thick brown sauce can be kept indefinitely in the refrigerator. Also known as: *ho yu* (China).

Palm sugar (jaggery)

This strong-flavoured dark sugar is obtained from the sap of coconut palms and Palmyrah palms. The sap is boiled down until it crystallises, and the sugar is usually sold in round, flat cakes or two hemispheres put together to form a ball and wrapped in dried leaves. Substitute black sugar, an unrefined, sticky sugar sold in health food stores, or use refined dark brown sugar sold at supermarkets. Thai recipes generally call for pale palm sugar, while Malaysian, Indonesian and Sri Lankan recipes favour dark palm sugar. Also known as: *jaggery, tanyet* (Burma), *skor tnowth* (Cambodia), *gur, jaggery* (India), *gula aren, gula jawa* (Indonesia), *gula Melaka* (Malaysia), *jaggery, hakuru* (Sri Lanka), *nam taan pep, nam taan bik, nam taan mapraow* (Thailand).

Paprika

Botanical name: *Capsicum tetragonum*

Paprika peppers can be tinned or bottled as pimiento, but are more often used dried and powdered and known simply as paprika. Good paprika should have a mild, sweet flavour and brilliant red colour. Although it is essentially a European flavouring, particularly used in Hungary and Poland, it is useful in Asian cooking for imparting the necessary red colour to a curry when the chilli tolerance of the diners is not very high. In Asia, the colour would come from 20 to 30 chillies!

Peanut oil

A traditional cooking medium in Chinese and Southeast Asian countries. Asian unrefined peanut oil is highly flavoured and more expensive than the refined peanut oil found in Western supermarkets. It has a high smoking point and adds a distinctive flavour to stir-fries. Refined peanut oil is ideal for deep-frying. Take all the usual precautions where peanuts are concerned and avoid it if cooking for anyone with nut sensitivities. Use olive oil flavoured with a little sesame oil as an alternative.

Pepper, black

Botanical name: *Piper nigrum*

Pepper, the berry of a tropical vine native to India, is green when immature, and red or yellow when ripe. Black pepper is obtained by boiling and then sun-drying the green, unripe drupes. It is only used in some curries, but is an important ingredient in garam masala. Vietnam is the main producer of pepper. Also known as: *nga-youk-kaun* (Burma), *hu-chiao* (China), *kali mirich* (India), *merica hitam* (Indonesia), *kosho* (Japan), *phik noi* (Laos), *lada hitam* (Malaysia), *paminta* (Philippines), *gammiris* (Sri Lanka), *prik thai* (Thailand).

Pepper, green

The unripe drupes which are used fresh in some Asian cuisines, such as Thai and Cambodian. Green peppercorns are mostly available tinned, bottled in brine or preserved in vinegar. Dried green peppercorns are sometimes available also. The fresh green pepper berries (drupes) are quite hot with heady, almost medicinal overtones.

Prawn powder, dried

Finely shredded dried prawns (shrimp), sold in packets at speciality food stores and Asian grocery stores.

Red asian shallots

Botanical name: *Allium ascalonicum*

Shallots are small, purplish onions with red-brown skin. Like garlic, they grow in a cluster and resemble garlic cloves in shape. The name ‘shallots’ in Australia is generally (and incorrectly) given to spring onions in some states.

Rice, ground

This can be bought at supermarkets and health food stores. It is slightly more granular than rice flour. It gives a crisper texture when used in batters.

Rice paper

Thin circular or square sheets of rice paste imprinted with a basket weave from the bamboo mats they are dried on. In their dry state they are very brittle and may shatter when dropped. After dipping in water they become

pliable and may be used to wrap a variety of fillings then eaten as is or deep-fried. In Vietnam, these translucent wrappers are known as *bahn tran*. Unrelated to the fine, wafer-like 'rice paper' used in confectionery, which is actually not made from rice at all.

Rice, toasted and ground

This can be bought in Asian grocery stores, but is also easy to prepare. Lightly brown raw jasmine rice in a dry frying pan over low heat for about 15 minutes, stirring constantly so that it does not brown unevenly or burn. It should be golden brown all over. Grind to a powder in a food processor or electric spice grinder. It adds texture and a distinctive flavour to Thai salads.

Rice vermicelli (rice-stick) noodles

These are very fine rice flour noodles sold in Chinese grocery stores. Soaking in hot water for 10 minutes prepares them sufficiently for most recipes, but in some cases they may need boiling for 1–2 minutes. When deep-fried they swell up and turn white. For a crisp result, fry them straight from the packet without soaking. Also known as: *mee sooer* (Cambodia), *mei fun* (China), *beehoon, meehoon* (Malaysia), *sen mee* (Thailand), *bún, lúa min* (Vietnam).

Rosewater

A favourite flavouring in Indian and Persian sweets, rosewater is the diluted essence extracted from rose petals by steam distillation. It is essential in Gulab jamun and Ras gula, and is also used in biriani. If you use rose essence or concentrate, be careful not to over-flavour and be sure to count the drops. However, with rosewater a 1 tablespoon-measure can safely be used. Buy rosewater from chemists or from shops specialising in Asian or Middle Eastern ingredients.

Salted soy beans (taucheo)

An Indonesian or Malaysian fermented soy bean sauce. The beans may be whole, but are very soft and easy to mash. Yellow bean sauce is a smooth

version. Thai soy bean paste is a suitable substitute. Also sold as *tauco* and *tauceo*.

Sambal ulek

A combination of chillies and salt, used in cooking or as an accompaniment. The old Dutch-Indonesian spelling, still seen on some labels, is *sambal oelek*.

Semolina

A wheat product sometimes known as 'farina', it comes in coarse, medium and fine grades. Recipes stipulate the correct grade to use, but a different grade can be substituted although there will be some change in texture. The bulk semolina sold in health food stores is medium grade; and the packaged semolina sold in Italian grocery stores and delicatessens is either medium or very fine. A little experimental shopping is recommended, for the grade of semolina is seldom labelled.

Sesame oil

The sesame oil used in Chinese cooking is extracted from toasted sesame seeds and gives a totally different flavour from the lighter-coloured sesame oil sold in health food stores. For the recipes in this book, buy sesame oil from Asian grocery stores. Use the oil in small quantities for flavouring, not as a cooking medium. Also known as: *hnan zi* (Burma), *ma yau* (China), *gingelly, til ka tel* (India), *goma abura* (Japan), *chan keh room* (Korea), *minyak bijan* (Malaysia), *thala tel* (Sri Lanka), *dau me* (Vietnam).

Sesame paste

Sesame seeds, when ground, yield a thick paste similar to peanut butter. Stores specialising in Middle Eastern foods sell a sesame paste known as tahini, but this is made from raw sesame seeds, is white and slightly bitter, and cannot be substituted for the Chinese version, which is made from toasted sesame seeds, and is brown and nutty. A suitable substitute is peanut butter with sesame oil added for flavour. Sesame paste is sold in tins or jars; it keeps indefinitely after opening.

Sesame seeds

Used mostly in Korean, Chinese and Japanese food, and in sweets in other Southeast Asian countries. Black sesame, another variety known as *hak chih mah* (China) or *kuro goma* (Japan), is mainly used in the Chinese dessert, toffee apples, and as a flavouring (gomashio) mixed with salt in Japanese food. Also known as: *hnan si* (Burma), *til, gingelly* (India), *wijen* (Indonesia), *keh* (Korea), *bijan* (Malaysia), *linga* (Philippines), *thala* (Sri Lanka), *nga dee la* (Thailand), *me* (Vietnam).

Shrimp sauce

Although not widely distributed as *bagoong* (Philippines) or *petis* (Indonesia), this is sold at Asian grocery stores as 'shrimp sauce' or 'shrimp paste'. Thick and greyish in colour, with a powerful odour, it is one of the essential ingredients in the food of Southeast Asia. Substitute dried shrimp paste (blacan) or anchovy sauce.

Spring roll pastry

Thin, white sheets of pliable pastry sold in plastic packets and kept frozen. Thaw and peel off one at a time (unused wrappers can be re-frozen). Large wrappers of the won ton type cannot be substituted.

Star anise

Botanical name: *Illicium verum*

The dried, star-shaped fruit of an evergreen tree native to China and Vietnam, it usually consists of eight segments or points. It is essential in Chinese cooking and is one of the key flavours in the stock for the Vietnamese rice noodle soup, *pho*. Also known as: *baht gok* (China), *badian* (India), *bunga lawang* (Indonesia and Malaysia), *poy kak bua* (Thailand), *hoi* (Vietnam).

Tamarind

Botanical name: *Tamarindus indica*

The tamarind is a sour-tasting fruit of a large tropical tree. It is shaped like a large broad (fava) bean and has a brittle brown shell, inside which are shiny dark seeds covered with tangy brown flesh. Tamarind is dried into a pulp

and sold in packets, as well as diluted with water and sold as a purée. These can vary in concentration. The pulp needs to be soaked first in hot water, then squeezed until it breaks up and dissolves. It needs to be strained before using. May be substituted with lemon juice. Also known as: *ma-gyi-thi* (Burma), *ampil tum* (ripe), *ampil kheei* (green) (Cambodia), *imli* (India), *mal kham* (Laos), *asam* (Malaysia and Indonesia), *sampalok* (Philippines), *siyambala* (Sri Lanka), *som ma kham* (Thailand), *me* (Vietnam).

Tapioca flour

Also known as tapioca starch, it is made from the dried washings of the cassava root. The flour provides a crisp coating on foods that are fried and is used in making many Asian sweets. Used to make sago and tapioca pearls. Also known as: *ling fun* (China), *tikhoor* (India), *katera pohom* (Indonesia), *tapioka* (Japan), *tepung ubi kayu* (Malaysia), *pang mun* (Thailand).

Taucheo

See salted soy beans.

Tofu

There is an abundance of varieties of this versatile soy product available. Fresh tofu, or bean curd, is found in the refrigerator section of Asian grocery stores and most large supermarkets. It comes in many forms: silken, soft or firm. Silken tofu is sweeter and more delicate than firm tofu, with a different texture and flavour. Once opened, tofu will keep for 2–3 days in the refrigerator if immersed in cold water that is changed daily. Dried tofu is sold in flat sheets or rounded sticks and needs no refrigeration. It has to be soaked before use – the sticks need longer soaking and cooking. Deep-fried tofu puffs are also available. Red tofu is much more pungent than fresh tofu, and has a flavour like smelly cheese. It is sold in bottles and used in certain sauces. Also known as: *dow foo, doufu, doufu-ru* (China), *tahu* (Indonesia), *doufu-kan, abura-age, yuba* (Japan), *taukwa* (Malaysia), *tojo, tokua* (Philippines), *tao hu, forng tao hu* (Thailand), *dau hu* (Vietnam).

Turmeric

Botanical name: *Curcuma longa* A rhizome of the ginger family, turmeric, A rhizome of the ginger family, turmeric, with its orange-yellow colour, is a mainstay of commercial curry powders. Though often called Indian saffron, it should never be confused with true saffron and the two may not be used interchangeably. Also known as: *fa nwin, sa nwin* (Burma), *romiet* (Cambodia), *wong geung fun* (China), *haldi* (India), *kunyit* (Indonesia), *ukon* (Japan), *kunyit* (Malaysia), *dilau* (Philippines), *kaha* (Sri Lanka), *khamin* (Thailand), *cú nghê, ngh* (Vietnam).

Vietnamese mint

Botanical name: *Persicaria odorata* and *odoratum*

Variously known as laksa leaves, Vietnamese coriander and Cambodian mint, this easy to propagate herb delivers a none too subtle kick to laksa, as well as salads and other dishes. It has a curious, slightly numbing effect on the tongue. Also known as: *chee sang hom, chee pwarng teja koon* (Cambodia), *phak pheo* (Laos), *daun kesom, daun laksa* (Malaysia), *daun kesom, daun laksa* (Singapore), *phak phai, phrik maa, chan chom, hom chan* (Thailand), *rau ram* (Vietnam).

Water chestnuts

Botanical name: *Eliocharis dulcis*

Used mainly for their texture in Asian cooking. Sometimes available fresh, their brownish black skin must be peeled away with a sharp knife, leaving the crisp, slightly sweet white kernel. They are also available in tins, already peeled and in some instances sliced. After opening, store in water in the refrigerator for 7–10 days, changing the water daily. Yam bean (jicama) may be substituted if water chestnut is unavailable. Dried, powdered water chestnut starch is used as an alternative to cornflour (cornstarch) for coating delicate meat such as chicken breast when deep-frying, as it helps lock in the juices. Also known as: *ye thit eir thee* (Burma), *mah tai* (China), *pani phul* (India), *tike* (Indonesia), *kuwai, kurogu-wai* (Japan), *apulid* (Philippines), *haeo-song krathiem, haeo cheen* (Thailand), *go nung* (Vietnam).

Winter bamboo shoots

See bamboo shoots.

Won ton wrappers

Small squares of fresh noodle dough available at most supermarkets and Asian grocery stores. They can be refrigerated for up to 1 week if well wrapped in plastic, or can be wrapped in foil and frozen. Sold by weight, there are approximately 60 wrappers to a 300 g (10½ oz) packet.

Wood ear fungus

Botanical name: *Auricalaria polytricha* Also known as black fungus, cloud ear fungus, tree

Also known as black fungus, cloud ear fungus, tree ear fungus, mouse ear or jelly mushroom, wood ear fungus is sold by weight, and in its dry state looks like greyish black pieces of torn paper. Soaked in hot water for 10 minutes, it swells to translucent brown shapes like curved clouds or a rather prettily shaped ear – hence the name 'wood ear fungus'. With its flavourless resilience it is a perfect example of a texture ingredient, adding no taste of its own but taking on subtle flavours from the foods with which it is combined. Cook for only 1–2 minutes. Also known as: *kyet neywet* (Burma), *wun yee* (China), *kuping jamu* (Indonesia), *kikurage* (Japan), *kuping tikus* (Malaysia), *hed hunu* (Thailand).

Yam bean (jicama)

Botanical name: *Pachyrhizus erosus* and *P. angulatus*

Curiously, the growers' notes say this plant of the legume family, which bears seed pods, has tubers which may be boiled like a potato. That is the last thing I would use them for. The main appeal of yam bean is the sweet crisp crunch of its white, uncooked flesh. I would recommend using it raw, peeled and sliced or diced, in salads or sweets; or even lightly cooked in stirfries, where it might retain some of its characteristic crunch. Yam beans are a very acceptable substitute for water chestnuts, when they are unavailable. Also known as: *saa got, dou-su* (China), *sankalu* (India), *bengkowang* (Indonesia), *kuzu-imu* (Japan), *bangkwang, singkwang* (Malaysia), *singkamas* (Philippines), *man kaew* (Thailand), *cu san* (Vietnam).

Yellow bean sauce

See salted soy beans (taucheo).

To Reuben, who married me before I learned to cook.

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